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**“Watchful Guardians of Liberty”: The French Revolution and the Development of
Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia, 1792-1797**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

Christopher James Consolino

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, VA
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Introduction

In 1792 the stakes of political discussion in Philadelphia began to change. According to the *General Advertiser*, “The question in America is no longer between federalism and anti-federalism but between republicanism and anti-republicanism.”¹ Unlike the political struggles between those for and against the Constitution, the debate had shifted to something more fundamental: the survival of the republican experiment itself. Although no American likely would have described himself as “anti-republican”—effectively an enemy of the United States’ very existence and founding principles—the editorial implicitly asserted that there existed in America the seeds of a monarchical party. These republicans feared most the “irresistible propensity of all governors to slide into despotism,” and were deeply concerned by what they perceived as Congress and the president taking an increasingly broad interpretation of their powers under the Constitution.²

The *General Advertiser*’s term “anti-republicanism” also carried strong international connotations. By the end of 1792, Americans had received word of the founding of the French Republic and of the increasing radicalization of the French Revolution. The December 1 issue of the *General Advertiser* contained news from the National Convention on the successes of the French armies, “who no longer combat for kings—for kings no longer exist in France. They combat for liberty and equality.”³ Many Americans who read through the pages of the *General Advertiser* considered the fates of American and French republicanism as intertwined. “Few people have a proper sense of

¹ *General Advertiser*, December 1, 1792.

² *Ibid.*, May 15, 1792.

³ *Ibid.*, December 1, 1792.

the importance of success of the French Revolution to the welfare and happiness of America,” read a June issue of the *General Advertiser*. “Should a counter-revolution be ultimately effected in France. The advocates of hereditary government . . . may here again be emboldened to come forward with their pernicious doctrines.”⁴ By the close of 1792, many Americans who had opposed Federalist political advances since the adoption of the Constitution were convinced: republican governments, both at home and abroad, had entered a critical stage in their development. Just as European monarchies were rallying their forces to crush French republicanism, Federalists seemed to be slowly dismantling the liberal foundations of American republicanism. From these mounting fears emerged the first successful opposition movement under the Constitution: the Democratic-Republican Party. In their opposition to Federalist policies, Democratic-Republicans frequently evoked the name of the French Revolution and used a number of French terms and symbols to identify their movement. However, the precise relationship between the development of the first opposition party and concurrent developments in France has remained largely unexplored. No single study has attempted to answer why, how, and to what extent the events of the French Revolution resonated with Americans opposed to the Federalist policies of the early and mid-1790s.

The lack of material treating the relationship between the emergence of Democratic-Republicanism and the French Revolution is somewhat surprising considering that the genesis of the first party system has long occupied historians of the early Republic. Most of the literature treating the development of opposition politics in

⁴ Ibid., June 22, 1792.

the 1790s can be divided into two categories: political histories and cultural histories.⁵ Modern political histories of the first party system extend back to Richard Hofstadter's *The Idea of a Party System* (1969), which traced the ideological origins and development of Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicanism from the constitutional debates through the nineteenth century.⁶ Following in Hofstadter's footsteps, political historians, fascinated by the development of American party politics and corresponding ideologies, continued to explore the clashes between Hamilton, Jefferson, and other elite political personalities in the early Republic (roughly defined as 1789 through the early decades of the nineteenth century).⁷ These historians were most interested in "placing the social and economic thought of articulate Americans in a meaningful ideological context."⁸ In attempting to construct a national republican ideology, early political histories devoted a majority of their time to grappling with the personal papers and correspondence of perceived political leaders and their elite contemporaries.⁹

⁵ Although a number of social histories of the early Republic appeared in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, these studies tend to shy away from political ideology, instead focusing on the interactions between republicanism and social constructions of class, race, and gender. See, for example, Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 1-9.

⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1790-1840* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1969).

⁷ Many political historians' works treating the 1790s are problematic in that they either consider the period as an epilogue to the American Revolution or a prologue to antebellum political culture. For the periodization of the early Republic and problems inherent thereto, see Gordon S. Wood, "The Significance of the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (1988), 5-6.

⁸ Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 5-11; and Richard Buel Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), x-xii.

⁹ For a more contemporary example of this focus on the founders and political elite as the ideological driving force in the early Republic, see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The earliest form of the Democratic-Republican Party assumed a more populist form than political historians of the early Republic cared to admit. Other historians, such as Eugene Perry Link, recognized the problematic nature of the predominating top-down historical model, and elected instead to survey the thoughts and actions of “unimportant people” in order to gain “a deeper understanding of the entire period.”¹⁰ Link’s history of the Democratic-Republican societies represented the first attempt to treat popular organizations of the 1790s as legitimate political and ideological forces. In doing so, Link argued that the “middling” and “lower sorts” that comprised these societies were well versed in the philosophies of the Enlightenment through their readings of Thomas Paine two decades earlier, and were keenly aware of the American Revolution’s international implications.¹¹ Since the average American was capable of participating in complex ideological dialogues independent of major politicians, Link could justify overlooking Jefferson and Hamilton’s philosophical exchanges.

While Link’s work remains the only full-scale survey of the popular political associations that would come to be known as the Democratic-Republican societies, several regional studies of the political clubs have since appeared. In most cases, these studies have restated or further explained Link’s original conclusions on the societies’ ideological complexity and political significance by applying his analysis to more geographically limited studies.¹² Indeed, political historians’ analysis of the Democratic-

¹⁰ Eugene Perry Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), ix-x.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 156-174.

¹² See, for example, Marco Sioli, “The Democratic Republican Societies at the End of the Eighteenth Century: The Western Pennsylvania Experience,” *Pennsylvania History* 60 (1993). Some larger regional works on Democratic-Republicanism devote space to the Democratic-Republican societies. Alfred Young uses several chapters of his monumental *The Democratic Republicans of New York* to explore the development of popular associations. Although detailed,

Republican societies and similar popular organizations has remained surprisingly static over the course of the past five decades. Matthew Schoenbachler's recent and relatively short synthesis of scholarship on the Democratic-Republican societies as a whole faithfully replicates Link's original argument that the societies represented a legitimate political challenge to Federalists from below, and laid the ideological groundwork for Jeffersonian republicanism at the end of the 1790s.¹³ Although more inclusive than previous history from the top models, these political histories of popular organizations nonetheless overlook the cultural dimensions of Democratic-Republicanism.

In the late 1990s, a new generation of cultural historians expanded on the work of Link and his followers, treating the populist elements of early Democratic-Republicanism by examining the politicization of festive culture. Len Travers and Simon Newman began to explore the centrality of popular celebrations, such as the Fourth of July, to the articulation of a national American identity. These cultural anthropological examinations of early American fetes began to bridge the gap between scholarship on evolving social norms and previous studies of political history from below. For Travers and Newman, the rites and symbols of public celebrations that had become deeply ingrained in American culture by the revolution "constituted a vital part of the political lives of early Americans

Young essentially confirms Link's analysis of the societies' meanings for the Democratic-Republican opposition of the 1790s. The monograph's true value extends from its contextualization of Democratic-Republican societies in the larger political culture of the early Republic. See, Alfred Young, *The Democratic-Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 392-419, 425-428, and 575-576.

¹³ Matthew Schoenbachler, "Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution: The Democratic Republican Societies of the 1790s," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (1998): 237-240. In his recent book "*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*" Albrecht Koschnik situates the Democratic-Republican societies within a broader context than Link's and Schoenbachler's studies but reaches similar conclusions about the societies' meanings for future opposition movements. Albrecht Koschnik "*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*": *Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 11-40.

in the era of the first party system.”¹⁴ Most importantly these studies established the importance of populist tendencies in the 1790s, helping to redirect attention away from the traditional subjects of political histories.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, some historians began integrating their studies of local festive culture with national political identities by creating models of a larger American public sphere. According to David Waldstreicher, early American festive culture helped to “mediate between local and national politics” in a country whose citizens were deeply cognizant of how their actions would be perceived by a larger “extralocal community.”¹⁵ These studies helped to unify further the seemingly disparate political, social, and cultural histories of the twentieth century. The discussions of an American public sphere in which citizens were aware of a national political culture also motivated other historians to turn their gaze across the Atlantic in search of international political and social dialogues. Waldstreicher, for example, identifies foreign policy as the most pressing political issue in the young Republic.¹⁶

Historians have long recognized that the French Revolution played an important role in shaping opposition politics of the 1790s. According to Hofstadter, “the French Revolution and the war that followed joined and intensified all the differences that separated Federalists from Jeffersonians.”¹⁷ Similarly, historians of popular festive

¹⁴ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1-10; See also Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 1-14.

¹⁵ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 293. See also, 17-29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

¹⁷ Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, xi. See also Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 303-374; and James Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 69-91.

culture have taken note of how the French Revolution informed and complemented celebrations of America's own revolution.¹⁸ Although both historiographical trends have rightly acknowledged the French influences on 1790s political culture, Matthew Hale argues that most scholars of the early Republic have underestimated how profoundly the French Revolution shaped American political thought in the 1790s.¹⁹ More problematically, these two historiographical trends have remained largely distinct (with the exception of Waldstreicher's work), and even Waldstreicher seems to underestimate the extent to which the French Revolution influenced opposition ideology.

This study begins where many of the classical works treating the development of the first opposition party in the United States have also begun, by examining the development of early Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia from its birth in 1792 until the implementation of the Jay Treaty in 1796 and the beginning of the Quasi-War with France in 1797. It seeks to establish both why and how the terms of opposition politics in the United States' capitol city changed so dramatically in such a relatively short time span. That the formation of the liberal Democratic-Republican Party coincided with the radicalization of the French Revolution in late 1792 and early 1793 is no happenstance. In considering how the French Revolution informed the development of American opposition politics during the 1790s, this thesis builds on a growing body of journalistic histories and considers the extent to which Americans consumed European news.²⁰

¹⁸ See Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 120-151.

¹⁹ Matthew Hale, "Political Time and Newspapers during the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792-1793," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (2009): 193-194.

²⁰ See, for example, Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

As the capitol city of the United States from 1790 to 1800, Philadelphia constituted the political heart of the United States. By the middle of the 1790s, the burgeoning city was home to a diverse population of more than 42,000 residents and a significant number of politically active foreign émigrés. Indeed, Philadelphia's location and population make the city an ideal setting for any comprehensive study of early national political culture. The citizens of Philadelphia during this time period have left behind a rich corpus of sources detailing the city's political history. Limiting the scope of the thesis to Philadelphia allows this study to draw extensively from a wide array of sources. Generally, the primary materials analyzed fall into three categories: personal papers and society records; published descriptions of public celebrations; and editorial pieces, society circular letters, and published society resolutions. Newspapers, constituting a majority of the sources used, provide useful accounts of domestic partisan events as well as international news reports. Additionally, newspapers are treated holistically as a product of partisan editors and writers. Although nearly all of the sources used throughout this thesis have appeared in the recent studies treating popular politics in the early Republic, historians have yet to integrate substantively all three types of evidence in a single work.

As the evidence suggests, the French Revolution was intimately connected to every stage of the Democratic-Republican movement's development. The radicalized revolution encapsulated all that Democratic-Republicans felt the United States had lost over the course of the first Washington administration's tenure. Just as Democratic-Republicans perceived British monarchism and aristocracy to be gradually infiltrating their national government, the French Revolution seemed to be removing all the vestiges

of the Ancien Régime's tyranny from France. In reminding Americans of their own revolution's unfulfilled and increasingly threatened democratic promise, the French Revolution helped to ignite the organization of the Democratic-Republican opposition to Hamiltonian Federalism. At the same time the French Revolution's own rich festive culture provided Democratic-Republicans with a clear symbolic language and space for linking their domestic concerns with a universal movement for democracy. The populist democratic forces that the French Revolution helped to unleash in Philadelphia, however, proved difficult to control as individual party members imposed their own meanings on the vague political ideologies of "liberty," "anti-monarchism," and the like, which Democratic-Republicanism espoused. Indeed, between 1792 and 1797 the French Revolution played three overlapping roles in the development of Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia. For Philadelphians discontented with the political direction of the United States the revolution was an impetus, an opportunity, and a problem.

Chapter One engages the traditional political histories of the 1790s by exploring how the radicalized French Revolution of 1792-1793 resonated with politically disenchanted Americans. This chapter demonstrates how Americans, inspired by the French, looked to fulfill the promise of their own revolution and began to shift the terms of political discussion by forming popular associations.²¹ The Democratic-Republican societies—modeled after French Jacobin Clubs but also reaching back to America's own revolutionary societies in their structure and operation—created a new space in which a

²¹ Although I agree with Gordon Wood's recent synthesis of the period that the French Revolution "seemed to be speaking for angry and aggravated peoples everywhere," I challenge the prevailing notion that Jefferson was the "emergent leader" of the party. Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 179-181.

diverse array of citizens could take an active role in political discussion and policymaking for the Democratic-Republican movement. Most importantly, the clubs framed political discussions in international terms, which ultimately led the public to associate Democratic-Republicanism with the French Revolution and other European movements for democratic government.

Chapter Two reconstructs the festive culture of early Democratic-Republicanism by exploring accounts of partisan holidays appearing in Philadelphia newspapers from 1793 to 1796. The French Revolution provided Democratic-Republicans with a means of distinguishing their party visually from their Federalist counterparts. By reviving traditional American revolutionary symbols now associated with France—such as the liberty cap, liberty pole, and liberty tree—Democratic-Republicans solidified their image as the inheritors of an enlightened revolutionary heritage. Moreover, the continuing progress of the French Revolution not only provided Democratic-Republicans with a host of opportunities to celebrate their participation in an international movement for democracy but further legitimized their cause in the eyes of the public. Democratic-Republicans' public use of symbols and rhetoric alluding to the American and French revolutions stirred in Philadelphians a nostalgia for the democratic Spirit of '76. The highly participatory Democratic-Republican festivals led hundreds of citizens to see themselves as taking part in a continuation of their and their fathers' struggle against tyranny.

Chapter Three examines how the Democratic-Republican movement used the press to mediate between individual beliefs and party ideology. Party symbols and rhetoric employed by Democratic-Republicans clearly portrayed opposition to

Federalism. At the same time, those in attendance at party rallies assigned more specific meanings and actions to the platforms of “liberty” and “democracy,” which became increasingly problematic for the Democratic-Republican leadership interested in moderating party ideology. This chapter shows, first, how Democratic-Republicans controlled the news from and images of France through partisan newspapers and, second, how party leaders used the same newspapers to distance their party from more radical interpretations of the French Revolution’s meaning. The chapter details the emergence of a partisan press in the early years of the 1790s and explains how the printers and editors increasingly worked in tandem with party leaders in the Democratic-Republican societies to exercise control and impose consistency on party ideology.

Finally, the thesis concludes with a brief discussion of Democratic-Republicanism’s decline in the face of a growing Federalist counter-opposition and increasing public criticism. Although the failure of Democratic-Republicanism ultimately resulted from the mounting tensions between the United States and France following the Senate’s ratification of the Jay Treaty in 1796, by 1796 there existed a more fundamental problem within the structure of early Democratic-Republicanism. From the outset of their movement, Democratic-Republicans sought to claim the populist aspects and liberal philosophies of the French Revolution as part of their movement without incurring the potential harms of revolt against the established United States government. The increasingly unstable dynamic between party leadership and the remainder of the party became unsustainable and led to the party’s demise.

Chapter One

The Inspiration: The Ideological and Structural Foundations of Democratic-Republicanism

Following the ratification of the Constitution, little time passed before public criticisms of the new Federalist Congress and Washington administration materialized. In the fall of 1788, Anti-Federalists, incensed by Federalist plans for the at-large election of representatives, took to newsprint, labeling their opponents “aristocratical tyrants” who were “ever insulting and abusing the old patriots and true friends of our country.”¹ As the political institutions framed in the Constitution became defined in practice, elite and middling Federalists and Anti-Federalists frequently engaged each other in heated debates. Each side invoked different visions of an American political system: whereas Federalists sought to create a strong and centralized national government, Anti-Federalists sought to concentrate political power in local and state institutions. Leading Anti-Federalist political figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, could not muster an effective opposition to Hamiltonian Federalists simply because their alternative American political system relied on active participation in local governing institutions that did not exist. More importantly, these early political contests revolved around specific issues of policymaking ranging from the election of representatives to Hamilton’s plan for federal debt assumption.² Although many leaders of the ineffectual Anti-Federalist opposition movement opposed Federalist policies on ideological grounds,

¹ Quoted in Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 154.

² For more on the content and expression of Federalist and Anti-Federalist debates 1788-1792, see *Ibid.*, 147-171.

they frequently engaged in compromises with their political opponents for fear of undermining national unity.³

In the final months of 1792 and the first months of 1793, the political landscape of the young United States shifted. Popular political associations (collectively known as the Democratic-Republican societies) formed throughout the country and began to publish heated critiques of the Washington administration and Hamilton's financial policies. As Philadelphia printer Benjamin Franklin Bache wrote to his father, "The spirit of republicanism is reviving, and the President, of whom no one, six months ago would have thought disrespectfully, is now freely spoken of, and in print [sic] found fault with."⁴ Although informed by Anti-Federalist political ideology, the Democratic-Republican opposition movement that began to materialize from 1792 through 1794 was far more than a simple revival of Anti-Federalism. Rather than challenge the legitimacy of the Constitution or the structure of its institutions, the Democratic-Republican movement united a diverse cast of Americans—including, for example, opponents and supporters of the Constitution's ratification—to oppose encroachments on individual liberties.⁵ Most notably, the new Democratic-Republican opposition differed from its Anti-Federalist forerunner in its use of popular political societies. As the movement's most basic political unit, the Democratic-Republican societies both developed and disseminated party ideology in their local communities. Following the creation of the first

³ James Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 33-38.

⁴ Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, February 3, 1793, Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society.

⁵ For a brief summary of the ideological similarities between Democratic-Republican and Anti-Federalist ideology, see Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 172-174. Although Anti-Federalist did publically oppose Federalist policy, they simultaneously balked at the idea of a party system. For both early Federalist and Anti-Federalist thought on the dangers of a formal party system, see Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, 41-73.

societies in Philadelphia in 1793, forty-six additional clubs were formed. Existing in close communication with each other, the Democratic-Republican societies and other affiliated clubs provided a relatively egalitarian forum in which citizens could offer a democratic critique of Federalist policy.⁶ When considered in isolation, the sudden emergence and rapid growth of Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia appears unprecedented. Looking at France, however, it becomes clear that the abrupt spread of political liberalism in America was not anomalous.

Nearly four thousand miles across the Atlantic, the French Revolution experienced its own drastic turn. On August 10, 1792, radical Jacobins calling for a new French constitution stormed the Tuileries Palace. The National Assembly acquiesced to the Jacobins' demands. The resulting National Convention abolished the monarchy and declared a republic.⁷ The democratic reforms that emerged provided for universal male suffrage, with the exceptions of servants and the unemployed. In January of 1793, the National Assembly moved to execute Louis XVI, and the former monarch went to the guillotine on January 21, 1793. Revolutionaries also looked to spread the revolution beyond French borders in an effort to rid Europe of its "tyrants," and by the end of January, 1793, the French Republic was at war with Austria, Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, Prussia, Spain, and Portugal. In the first months of 1793, France's republican revolution had reached its apogee.⁸

⁶ Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 69-70.

⁷ When France adopted the Revolutionary Calendar in September 1793, September 22, 1792 was retroactively adopted as the beginning of Year One.

⁸ For more on the radicalization of the French Revolution, 1792-1793, see William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 187-209.

The temporal proximity of the French Revolution's radical turn and the development of a popular, successful opposition movement in the United States was far more than a matter of coincidence. Throughout the first years of the 1790s, tensions between Federalists and those opposed to their policies mounted. Many historians have argued that the development of a strong opposition party was an inevitable consequence of these intensifying political battles; the political capital necessary for the formation of an opposition party existed since Ratification. The growing numbers of Americans discontented with the first Washington administration only needed a reason to organize, but no one event or series of events between 1789 and 1792 proved controversial enough to spark the formation of an opposition party. In 1793, however, the French Revolution provided the necessary impetus to organize discontented Philadelphians into a single political movement.⁹ As Bache observed, "The national character which had almost taken its form, before the successes of the French were known, is refermenting & will no doubt take a shape less inauspicious to liberty & equality."¹⁰ The revolution, however, functioned as more than a chance event that Democratic-Republicans used as a superficial reason for hastening the inevitable. Instead, it deeply influenced the ideology, organization, and rhetoric of the emerging Democratic-Republican Party. The developing events in France inspired a more fervent and internationally-oriented opposition party in the United States than would have otherwise formed. The surviving constitutions, minutes, and resolutions of the Democratic-Republican societies of Philadelphia illuminate the two central issues concerning the emergence of a Democratic-Republican opposition between 1792 and 1794. First, they help to explain why the French Revolution

⁹ Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, 74-86.

¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, February 3, 1793.

resonated so strongly with Philadelphians, and, second, they show how the French Revolution influenced the structure of the early Democratic-Republican Party.

News of a radicalized French Revolution provided the impetus for Americans disenchanted with the increasing conservatism of the United States government to begin more actively opposing Federalist policies. The rapid unfolding of events across the Atlantic in late 1792 and early 1793 sharpened divisions between the Federalists, who saw the revolution as dangerously uncontrollable, and their opponents, who saw the same event as an extension of their own revolt against British rule.¹¹ As they observed the French fulfilling the liberal democratic promise of their own revolution, many Americans became aware of and incensed by the United States' political conservatism, fearing domestic encroachments upon their liberties. Americans who had recently removed themselves or been excluded from political discourse reasserted themselves. They did so by forming popular political societies which resembled the pro-revolutionary clubs and associations of the French and American revolutions. France furnished members of these societies with a new vocabulary for articulating their dissatisfaction with Federalist policies and expressing the legitimacy of the Democratic-Republican opposition.

Revolution, Ideology, and the Origins of Opposition

The first generation of citizens following the American Revolution venerated their fathers as republican role-models. These revolutionary characters were integral to an idealized national history, which told the story of how oppressed American patriots fought bravely to expel British aristocracy and tyranny from the colonies. This story of

¹¹ Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 69-70.

Americans fighting for and winning their liberties became a cultural legacy common to all United States citizens.¹² Although Americans had generally accepted a common narrative of their revolution, they became increasingly divided over its interpretation following the ratification of the Constitution. In the early 1790s, Americans conceptualized their revolution in two different ways. On one side, the Federalists saw the Constitution as ending a revolutionary chapter in American history. In a two-step process, the American Revolution had released the colonies from the tyranny of monarchy, and the Constitution had transformed the Enlightenment ideologies of the revolution into a legitimate and functioning republican government. On the other hand, a growing number of Democratic-Republicans believed that the revolution was the beginning of a continuously unfolding democratic process.¹³

According to the emerging Democratic-Republican ideology, American democracy was in a nascent state and required continuous protection on the part of citizens. Otherwise, corrupting forces—both domestic and international—would slowly transform the United States from a republic into an absolutist state.¹⁴ As a December 1792 *National Gazette* editorial articulated, there is “in every country a kind of natural aristocracy, haughty, aspiring, ambitious, enemies to freedom, scorning the idea of Equality, looking down upon the people as an inferior order of beings, and improving every opportunity . . . to exalt themselves above their fellow citizens.” Democratic-Republicans believed that these corrupting forces existed even within the United States. The editorial continues, “Let us not suffer ourselves to be led away by the dangerous

¹² Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 4-5.

¹³ These differences in the ways Federalists and Democratic-Republicans conceptualized the legacy of the Revolution most clearly manifested themselves in the ways these two groups celebrated national rites, such as the Fourth of July. *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁴ McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 48.

delusion, that we have no such characters amongst us.”¹⁵ In the case of the United States, Democratic-Republicans saw Federalists’ attempts to assert the power of the central government at the expense of state sovereignty as a dangerous step towards oligarchy and then monarchy. The recent democratic successes of the American Revolution, however, blinded citizens of the young United States to the subversive forces of 1790s Federalism. One opinion column in the *General Advertiser* advised:

The people under every newly established government, and fresh from a revolution, may be compared to a company of men standing on a bar or shoal, which has become dry by the ebbing sea. They in general pay no attention to the return of the flood, and when it has swelled so far as to cover only their feet, or ankles, they remain thoughtless as ever, and are sure in a few hours to be overwhelmed by the fathoms of the deep.¹⁶

Although Federalism did not outwardly appear to most citizens as a subversive aristocratic force, Democratic-Republicans saw the potential of Federalist platforms (especially Hamilton’s economic system) to permanently extinguish American liberties. If citizens did not soon rally an opposition movement, Federalist policies would irreparably damage American democracy.¹⁷

In articulating their fears to other Philadelphians, early Democratic-Republicans couched their criticism of a perceived American aristocracy in familiar terms. Opinion columns frequently spoke of “tyranny in the eastern world,” “despots,” and the “threat of aristocracy.” Many reminded their fellow citizens of the “Spirit of ’76” as well as of their fathers’ and brothers’ struggles to win the United States’ present independence. John Dunlap, one of the original printers of the Declaration of Independence, reprinted the

¹⁵ *National Gazette*, December 19, 1792.

¹⁶ *General Advertiser*, July 27, 1792.

¹⁷ Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, 85.

“tract which gave Freedom to the world” in the July 4, 1792 issue of his newspaper *The American Daily Advertiser*. He was motivated by the extent to which “some of our Citizens appear disposed to view Monarchal Power with different eyes from those with which they viewed it in 1776.”¹⁸ Federalists’ inclinations to strengthen the United States’ economic and political ties with Britain undermined the spirit and accomplishments of the American Revolution, according to Dunlap. By reminding Americans of their past struggles against British tyranny and their current political lethargy, Dunlap alluded to the necessity for a vocal opposition to Federalists’ pro-British economic policies. If citizens openly discussed and critiqued government policy, then the entire country would begin to understand the growing threats to American Freedom. Passive acceptance of Federalist policy would only enfeeble citizens politically. If all Americans did not consistently participate in the United States’ democratic system, then a subversive dynamic of political deference would become the norm. One anonymous citizen, using the pseudonym “Argus,” wrote to the editor of the *National Gazette* in the summer of 1792, “the exercise of the right of speaking what we think, and that in the style of freedom and independence, is to be expected and ought to be encouraged.” To abstain from political dialogue, however, would be a “dereliction of that right” and “derision of social duty.”¹⁹ According to Argus and some of his contemporaries, in neglecting to engage in meaningful opposition and thus abandoning their previous vigilance, Americans allowed Federalists to undermine the political gains of their hard-fought revolution.

¹⁸ *American Daily Advertiser*, July 4, 1792.

¹⁹ By using the name Argus, the author likely refers to Argus Panoptes, the all-seeing Greek mythological creature. The use of this name plays into the Democratic-Republican belief that many American could not perceive the dangers of 1790s Federalism. *American Daily Advertiser*, August 10, 1792.

Argus's appeal for Americans to express openly their disapproval of Federalist policy reveals a growing Democratic-Republican frustration with many Americans' failure to articulate their political sentiments publically. In addition to defining what policies citizens should oppose, the Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia sought to define how Americans should express their opposition. The Constitution merely provided a general framework for the nation's political structure and little in the way of a guide for political discourse.²⁰ Whatever shape the political public sphere of 1790s took would likely set the tone for future political dialogues. On the one hand, Federalists envisaged a "consensual and unitary public sphere" of "common discourse," in which political opposition was confined to the halls of Congress and state legislatures.²¹ Social discourse emphasizing fraternity and unity as citizens of the United States constituted legitimate public expression. Democratic-Republicans, however, saw the unitary public sphere model as a means of limiting opposition to the Washington administration. According to the Democratic-Republicans, apolitical public discourse ran counter to the very reasons for the freedoms of speech enshrined in the Bill of Rights. They sought to construct a new model for discourse that would publically challenge "hierarchy, moderation, and balance with a revolutionary Enlightenment."²² This new movement drew on a familiar revolutionary vocabulary that integrated old distinctions with new republican terms imported from France, emphasizing collective resistance to encroachments on liberty.

²⁰ Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 5.

²¹ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 103-104.

²² John L. Brooke, "Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic," in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 310-311; and Koschnik, "Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together," 22-23.

The movement's legitimacy stemmed from both the United States' own revolutionary heritage and the recent spread of republicanism throughout Europe.

The Formation of an Opposition Sphere

Although the Washington administration and Federalist policies had been the objects of criticism prior to 1793, these critiques formed a set of disjointed complaints against specific policies. Despite the appearance of criticisms and pleas for a more politically active citizenry, the rhetoric of these early Democratic-Republican editorials and letters to the editor did not constitute a coherent opposition movement. Rather, this rhetoric served as the core component of the organized political party that would emerge in the spring of 1793 and strengthen throughout the mid-1790s. The Democratic-Republican Societies created gathering places for members of the new party. More importantly, the proceedings of the societies were markedly egalitarian; they engaged individuals from across the socio-economic spectrum in political discourse. Following the establishment of the German Republican Society of Philadelphia in April 1793, at least 32 similar organizations appeared throughout the United States in the subsequent 24 months. By 1800, more than 40 popular associations formed in the 1790s could be classified as Democratic-Republican Societies.²³ Regularly corresponding with each other, these societies became such a significant force that Federalist Nathaniel Chipman

²³ Philip Foner, introduction to *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions and Toasts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 7.

considered them “not only useless, but dangerous.”²⁴ Even Washington felt so threatened by the strengthening Democratic-Republican movement that he openly rebuked the “self-created societies” before Congress in August of 1794.²⁵ Like his Federalist contemporaries, Washington knew that the societies had begun to challenge Federalist dominance of political discourse.²⁶

To a great extent, the Democratic-Republican Societies’ success as popular political organizations stemmed from their surprisingly diverse membership. Although Federalists were quick to characterize the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania as a group of “butchers, tinkers, broken hucksters, and trans-Atlantic traitors,” the societies’ membership represented a cross section of Philadelphia’s population.²⁷ Of the 320 members recorded in the minutes of the society, craftsmen represented the largest professional contingent, just slightly more than 30 percent of the society. Merchants and public officials also constituted a sizable portion of society membership, while prominent printers, doctors, and other professionals were well represented within the society’s ranks.²⁸ This same diversity was also apparent in the organization’s leadership: the officers of the society for the year 1794 included three public officials, a lawyer, a doctor,

²⁴ Nathaniel Chipman to Alexander Hamilton, June 9, 1794, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett et al., Vol. 15 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1961), 467.

²⁵ Robert Wiebe, *Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1984), 73.

²⁶ For the Federalist conception of a unitary public sphere, see Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies,” 296-309.

²⁷ William Cobbett, *A Little Plain English Addressed to the People of the United States* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1795), 70.

²⁸ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 71-72. For a complete list of all known members’ names and occupations, see Ronald M. Bauman, “The Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia: The Origins, 1776-1797” (Ph.D diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1970), 598-601. Bauman’s analysis of membership shows that the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania was more diverse than Link originally indicated, identifying a larger number of merchants and public officials within the society’s records.

a tanner, a druggist, a hatter, an innkeeper, and a printer.²⁹ Beyond representing a diverse array of socio-economic backgrounds, the Democratic-Republican Societies additionally accepted a number of émigrés into their ranks who brought with them news of European monarchism's horrors and praise for the republicanism fostered by the French Revolution.³⁰

While the scholarship on the Democratic-Republican Societies has provided a clear account of the organizations' social composition and political trajectories, historians have not provided explanations as to why such a successful and diverse populist opposition movement took shape so rapidly beginning in the spring and summer 1793.³¹ Most historians have considered the formation of an opposition party to balance Federalism an inevitable consequence of growing dissatisfaction with Hamilton's policies.³² As shown above, the political will necessary for establishing a countermovement to the Federalists existed well before 1793, and no single incident or sequence provoked a sufficiently negative political backlash in early 1793 to cause the sudden development of a strong opposition party. In searching for the initial force behind the party's formation, historians of the Democratic-Republican Societies have generally looked to "the reverberation of events abroad," arguing that "the emergence of popular organizations in 1793 was part of a cycle of revolutionary influence moving around the

²⁹ For the results of the society's 1794 election of officers, see Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, January 2, 1794, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁰ A majority of the émigrés who found themselves in the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania were printers. Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 228-233.

³¹ In the first chapter of his monograph on the Democratic-Republican societies, for example, Link focuses his attention on the societies' domestic ideological origins, but does not clarify the impetus behind the sudden emergence of the societies beginning in 1793. See Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 3-18.

³² Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, 80-81.

north Atlantic.”³³ These accounts, however, fail to explain why the French Revolution—having progressed steadily for nearly four years—had not previously inspired the formation of an opposition movement in the United States. A more complete analysis of this international political exchange comes from John Brooke, who argues that the Democratic-Republican societies formed as a response to an “increasingly radical French Revolution.”³⁴ Still, Brooke’s work does not provide concrete evidence to show definitively why the radicalization of the French Revolution necessarily served as the primary stimulus for the emergence of an opposition to Federalists.

The inspiration for the Democratic-Republican opposition came in the six months prior to the German Republican Society’s establishment in April of 1793. The sequence of events in France that began with the abolition of monarchy and founding of the first French Republic in September of 1792 provided the impulse for the founding of the Democratic-Republican Party in the United States. The Constitution of 1792 alone represented cause for celebration among Democratic-Republicans: the French Republic became the first nation to institute universal male suffrage; and over the course of the following year, the populist currents of the revolution only strengthened.³⁵ Like the French, Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia also envisioned a leveling of society, arguing for similar measures enfranchising those excluded from the political dialogues.³⁶

³³ Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies,” 314. See also Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 6; and Matthew Schoenbachler, “Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution,” 243-244.

³⁴ Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies,” 309-316. See also Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 69-91.

³⁵ Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 248-250.

³⁶ In 1795, for example, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania would pass a set of resolutions in favor of public education so that “the children of the poor may have equal opportunities with those of the rich, for the acquisition of political and other useful knowledge,” noting that this

Moreover, the French Revolution increasingly resembled that of America and promised to give a *coup de grace* to tyranny throughout the Old World.³⁷ With the French Republic's declaration of war on Great Britain in January of 1793, it seemed to the Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia as if their own revolution was being repeated abroad as France attempted to free itself from monarchy. As a letter to the editor of the *National Gazette* asked in April, 1793, "Are not the Frenchmen asserting the same natural rights which we claimed, for which we fought, and to obtain which the best blood of our country was shed?"³⁸

The ideologies and structures of the American and French revolutions seemed to be so closely entwined that the success of one meant the triumph of the other. France had become "the theatre of the most important events, the center of that spirit of enlightened reformation which bids fair to be transfused by her example."³⁹ Commenting on the importance of this radicalized French Revolution, Thomas Jefferson wrote his confidant William Short on January 3, 1793, "The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue . . . rather than it should have failed I would have seen half the earth desolated."⁴⁰ The rapid succession of revolutionary events in France resonated in the American conscience and awoke a revolutionary spirit that had been dormant since the ratification

egalitarian system would "greatly tend to call forth into the public life such as may be most useful to their country." Meeting minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, March 13, 1795.

³⁷ While Americans welcomed the abolition of monarchy in France, a great deal of Democratic-Republicans lamented the death of King Louis XVI. They recognized, however, that regicide would unfortunately be necessitated by the revolution. As Bache wrote his father contemplating the fate of the king, "I have great hopes that the French for humanity sake, not for the sake of royalty, will forbear sacrificing Louis & Antoinette to their just vengeance; but from the drift of the English prints it appear and it seems to be your opinion, that they must die martyrs in a bad cause." Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, January 10, 1793.

³⁸ *National Gazette*, April 20, 1793.

³⁹ *General Advertiser*, January 15, 1793.

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson to William Short, January 3, 1793, quoted in Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 71.

of the Constitution.⁴¹ Indeed, in the absence of the French Revolution, the first opposition party in the United States would certainly have taken a different form and intensity.

Members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania and its German counterpart expressed, tempered, and confirmed these sentiments in meetings of the societies as the two institutions bound the American and French revolutions together in their political rhetoric.

The Structure and Rhetoric of Opposition

Members of the Democratic-Republican movement revived traditional forms of popular organization established during the American Revolution to affirm both their own late struggle for liberty and the French Revolution. Although influenced by the French Jacobin Clubs and reform societies of England, Democratic-Republican societies took their structure from the Sons of Liberty, Committees of Correspondence, and Whig Clubs. The ideology of these societies, molded by events abroad, was strikingly transnational in its scope, for Democratic-Republicans saw themselves as participating directly in an international movement for the spread and preservation of democratic government. By employing familiar models of political resistance from the American and French revolutions, the existence of the Democratic-Republican societies functioned as a call to arms. Their reappearance in the United States attested to the presence of tyranny domestically as well as internationally and to the need to curtail the advances of absolutism.

⁴¹ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 56.

The “Constitution of the German Republican Society in and around Philadelphia” first appeared in print on April 16, 1793 in Henry Kämmerer’s newspaper *Die Philadelphische Correspondenz*. As with the revolutionary societies of the 1770s, the German Republican Society envisioned itself as the guardian of the United States’ “political welfare,” drawing attention to laws and measures that “too closely tread upon the character of free citizens.” A president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, all of whom served one-year terms, constituted the organization’s leadership. The society restricted membership to the German-speaking community and conducted all proceedings in German.⁴² The German Republican Society, just like earlier revolutionary organizations, sought to elect men of “respectable behavior” who “cherish true republican principles.”⁴³ Upon election, “every member should sign these same rules to prove that he pledges himself thereto upon his honor.” The German Republican Society’s constitution can also be contrasted with the United States Constitution: the strict regulation of voting procedure in the society, the brevity of term length for officers, and the society’s emphasis on preserving citizens’ liberties expresses a Democratic-Republican interpretation of the more conservative Federal Constitution. Indeed, through their constitution the German Republican Society created an ideal political unit drawing on revolutionary and contemporary influences.

Although the constitution of the German Republican Society inferred the organization’s structural and ideological roots, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania directly acknowledged the influences of the American and French revolutions on its formation. According to the “Principles, Articles, and Regulations” of the society adopted

⁴² Minutes of the society, however, were kept in English as well as German.

⁴³ “Grundregeln der Deutschen Republicanischen Gesellschaft, in und um Philadelphia, Pennsylvanien,” *Philadelphische Correspondenz*, April 16, 1793. (My own translation.)

on May 30, 1793, the revolutions of America and France “have withdrawn the veil which concealed the dignity and the happiness of the human race, and have taught us, no longer dazzled by the adventitious splendor or awed by antiquated usurpation, to erect the Temple of LIBERTY upon the ruins of *Palaces* and *Thrones*.” Surveying the political landscape of the United States 1793, the founders of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania found “occasion to lament, that the vigilance of the People has been too easily absorbed in victory.” Despite the present enjoyment of liberties, the society believed that American freedom faced a very real threat of decline, warning Philadelphians that “the prize which has been achieved by the wisdom and valor of one generation, has too often been lost by the ignorance and supineness of another.”⁴⁴ These Philadelphians looked to older associational means of checking tyranny tested in the American Revolution. Just like their German counterparts, the society’s members elected officers—consisting of a president, two vice presidents, two secretaries, and a treasurer—to single year terms. Additionally, the rules and regulations of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania ordered the formation of a “*Corresponding Committee* of five members” responsible for communicating “with all other Societies that may be established on similar principles.”⁴⁵ The network created by these corresponding societies would undoubtedly facilitate the widespread discussion of government conduct, while also ensuring the cohesiveness of the developing opposition movement.

This frequent correspondence with other like organizations helped establish a common ideology and language of opposition. In Philadelphia, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania “felt uncommon satisfaction in finding so much zeal in their German

⁴⁴ *Principles, Articles, and Regulations, Agreed upon by the Members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, May 30th 1793* (Philadelphia: Eleazer Oswald, 1793).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

brethren,” vowing to “fraternize with the German Republican Society of Philadelphia in any measures that will perpetuate the blessings of a free government.”⁴⁶ The resolutions and letters frequently exchanged by the two societies included approbations of the French Revolution and progress of the republican revival in the United States. In a set of resolutions addressed to the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the German Republican Society shared its concern for “the attempts which are being made to depress the French character in this country.” Moreover, the resolution emphasized the presence of men “who under the guise of patriotism, enter into a defense, nay a panegyric upon the perfidious, insolent, and tyrannical conduct of Great-Britain.”⁴⁷ As customary, upon receiving the German Republican Society’s resolutions, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania arranged for the publication of the resolutions with a “resolution of concurrence” attached. In a letter to the president and members of the German Republican Society, the members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania explained that the resolutions “have our unanimous approbation—They speak our sentiments;—they breathe our feelings,” and attached to the letter were several of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania’s own resolutions “past some time ago.”⁴⁸ In a vein rhetorically similar to that of their German counterparts, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania passed numerous resolutions on April 10 underscoring British tyranny’s threat to American liberty:

Resolved, as the opinion of this society . . . that the success of Freedom against Tyranny, the triumphs of our magnanimous French brethren . . . have been the means once more of guaranteeing the Independence of this Country; that their glorious example ought to animate us to every exertion to raise our prostrate

⁴⁶ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, March 13, 1794.

⁴⁷ *General Advertiser*, March 10, 1794.

⁴⁸ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, March, 13 1794.

character, and every tie of gratitude and interest should lead us to cement our connection with that great Republic.⁴⁹

The April 10 resolutions both reiterated and extended the earlier motions of the German Republican Society, underscoring the urgency of the revived opposition and the threats of British tyranny to Americans' republican character. As with other sets of resolutions, these motions, transmitted throughout Philadelphia for the consumption of both Anglophone and Germanophone Democratic-Republicans, would meet with similar approval.⁵⁰

The exchange and discussion of resolutions among the Democratic-Republican societies of Philadelphia reveals the extent to which these associations operated collectively in establishing a common oppositional rhetoric.⁵¹ Through communication, approval, and the further dispersal of resolutions, the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania created a rhetorical tradition. Just as the German Republican Society's resolutions emphasized a renewed British threat to American sovereignty, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia's April 10 resolutions revived a familiar revolutionary language. Alluding to the alliance system of the American Revolution, the Democratic-Republican societies of Philadelphia defined a political

⁴⁹ Ibid., April 10, 1794.

⁵⁰ In several instances, the minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania make special note that their resolutions are to be published in German as well as English. On July 3, 1793, for example, the society ordered that their Principles, Articles, and Regulations "be also published in the German Newspaper." Ibid., July 3, 1793.

⁵¹ The frequent correspondence between the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania was facilitated by joint memberships to both societies. Michael Leib, for example, served as the first secretary of the German Republican Society from its founding until the first formal election of officers in 1793 and was later voted onto the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania's Corresponding Committee for the years 1793 and 1794. Andreas Geyer, secretary of the German Republican Society in 1793 would also join the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania. For the election of officers of the German Republican Society for the year 1793, see *Philadelphische Correspondenz*, May 21, 1793.

dichotomy between Tory and Patriot: allied with the French, the Democratic-Republicans established themselves as sons of the American Revolution, at the same time equating the aristocratic Federalists with the reviled Tories. In their March 13 letter to the German Republican Society, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia characterized their domestic opponents as “aristocracy, under the masque of Federalism.”⁵² The opposition sphere of Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republican societies defined itself as the patriotic alternative to Federalist aristocracy. To establish the legitimacy of their movement, members of the societies appealed to recognized categories and divisions of the American Revolution.

The Democratic-Republican societies sought to further create a sense of fraternity among their members through the use of the French term “Citizen” as a formal title.

When revising a circular letter to the counties on July 3, 1793, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania moved, “that the word ‘sir’ be struck throughout the Letter and the words ‘humble servant’ from the subscription thereof, and that the words ‘fellow Citizens’ and ‘fellow Citizens’ be substituted thereof.”⁵³ The following year, the society further clarified its use of the term “citizen” as a title by resolving, “That the appellation, ‘Citizen’, shall, exclusively of all titles, be used in the correspondence of this Society; that the usual form at the bottom of letters be superseded.”⁵⁴ Beyond functioning as a symbolic term associating members of the Democratic-Republican societies with patriotism and republican duty, the use of “Citizen” had a profound social effect on the societies. By superseding all other titles, the term “Citizen” broke all preexisting social and political boundaries within the society, emphasizing the members’ fraternal relationship in a struggle to preserve their freedoms. This single word, when used in the

⁵² Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, March 13, 1794.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, July 3, 1793.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, March 27, 1794.

context of the societies, created a space for discourse characterized by universal access to political discussions, where a diverse group of craftsmen, merchants, public officials, doctors, lawyers, printers, and other professionals participated in debates as social equals.

The use of the title “Citizen” perfectly encapsulated the desire of Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republican societies to function as both domestic and international crusaders for liberty. In its constitution, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania sought to establish an association “unfettered by *religious* or *national* distinctions” in its endeavor to preserve the rights of man.⁵⁵ Calling each other “Citizen” served as a direct reference to their French sister republic, constantly reminding society members of their participation in a larger, transatlantic revolutionary struggle. In several instances, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania ordered their Corresponding Committee to establish contact with the French National Assembly. Although the minutes of the society do not indicate that the society was ever able to initiate a correspondence, the attempt itself illustrates the desire of the society’s members to establish a transnational dialogue.⁵⁶ To the Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia it seemed only fitting that Americans should defend the French Republic against British invasion. By January of 1794 it was clear to Democratic-Republicans that France was “greatly contending against a world for the same rights which she assisted us to establish.”⁵⁷

Since the French Revolution was an extension of a continuing American crusade against tyranny to the societies, international concerns necessarily paralleled domestic

⁵⁵ *Principles, Articles, and Regulations, Agreed upon.*

⁵⁶ The Society’s Corresponding Committee was first ordered to “draft a letter to the French National Convention” on January 16, 1794. Future orders to have the letter redrafted throughout the year seem to suggest that the society never established formal contact with the Convention. Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, January 16, 1794.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, January 2, 1794.

issues. Rather than passively watching the French Revolution unfold from a distance, members of the Philadelphia societies envisaged themselves as participating in the global expansion and protection of democracy. They would accomplish this not only through checking the expansion of conservatism domestically but also by lobbying for the United States government to aid the French Republic in its war against Prussia, Austria, and, most pressingly, Britain.⁵⁸ As Bache wrote his father in August, 1793, “We are still engaged in interpreting our treaty with France.”⁵⁹ According to Democratic-Republicans, the Franco-American Treaty of Alliance signed in 1778, which gave open support of the French army, navy, and treasury to American revolutionary forces, still bound the United States diplomatically to France. The provisions of the treaty, argued Democratic-Republicans, required that the United States come to the full aid of France in its war against Britain. To the chagrin of Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republicans, this interpretation was “as much narrowed as possible as far as the French interest is concerned.”⁶⁰ In a February 1794 letter to the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the German Republican Society expressed its approval of James Madison’s resolutions to retaliate against British restrictions on American commerce.⁶¹ In its second April 10 motion, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania articulated its displeasure with Washington’s sudden disregard for the United States’ treaty with France: “*Resolved*, as the opinion of this Society, That the Proclamation of Neutrality by our Executive, tho’ we

⁵⁸ Great Britain and France were at war continuously from 1793 until 1802.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, August 22, 1793.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *General Advertiser*, March 10, 1794.

have every reason to believe it the offspring of the best motives, is not only a questionable constitutional act, but has eventually proved impolitic.”⁶²

Although the Proclamation of Neutrality represented only an indirect dismissal of America’s alliance with France, Federalist attempts to establish a strong Anglo-American alliance constituted a far more direct threat to the preservation of American freedom. On June 5, 1794, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania entertained resolutions from the German Republican Society “protesting against the appointment of John Jay as Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Great Britain.”⁶³ As one of the fathers of the Federalist Party, Jay represented a pro-British aristocrat to the Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia. Moreover, Jay’s appointment amounted to a “dangerous thrust of power” on the part of the Washington administration.⁶⁴ Certainly, argued Democratic-Republicans, the judiciary could not fairly appraise the constitutionality of a treaty its chief justice negotiated.⁶⁵ The resulting treaty, with its heavy concessions to Great Britain seemed to be a direct surrender to America’s former oppressor and therefore confirmed suspicions that the Federalists would sacrifice American independence for their own political gains.⁶⁶ Later in the decade, one Democratic-Republican editorial would go so far as to claim that Federalists, considering “a limited monarchy more tolerable than was heretofore supposed,” would approve of placing an English prince upon an American throne.⁶⁷

⁶² Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, April 10, 1794.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, June 5, 1794.

⁶⁴ *American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 4, 1794.

⁶⁵ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 130-131.

⁶⁶ Foner, introduction to *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 37.

⁶⁷ *Aurora*, August 18, 1799.

The political success of the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, when compared to their Anti-Federalist predecessors, extended from their ability to couple their critique of Federalist policy with a larger revolutionary purpose. The societies' dedication to the international cause of liberty appealed to a diverse array of Americans who were increasingly convinced that their liberties were threatened by "the encroachments, which all Governments endeavor to make upon the People's rights."⁶⁸ At the same time, the revival of categories such as "tyrant" and "patriot" allowed the Democratic-Republican societies to differentiate themselves from Federalists, symbolically affirming their legitimacy through their association with America's old ally and, consequently, their own patriotic heritage. The war between Britain and France in 1793 recreated the political divisions and alliances of the American Revolution. It quickly became the opinion of Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans that "Great Britain has been waging a war upon us," and that Federalists were complacently allowing a British influence to take hold that "has operated to make [the United States] a tributary to Great Britain and to engender systems and corruption baneful to Liberty."⁶⁹

More than any other event in the early 1790s, the French Revolution provided the impetus for the formation of the first cogent opposition to Federalism. The increasingly radical nature of the revolution following the abolition of monarchy and the declaration of the first French Republic rallied extant political dissent in the United States into a formal opposition movement. Beyond providing an inspiration, the French Revolution furnished Americans with a common vocabulary for expressing their political sentiments.

⁶⁸ *General Advertiser*, March 13, 1794.

⁶⁹ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, April 10, 1794.

Begun within the German Republican Society of Philadelphia and then expanded by the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the use of the term “citizen” and the talk of fraternity alluded to a collective revolutionary past and present. The resulting opposition movement created a diverse public sphere that sought to transcend social and geographic boundaries, emphasizing participation by all citizens in political dialogues. What began within the meeting halls of the Democratic-Republican societies quickly spread into the streets and print culture of Philadelphia, where these same Philadelphians used the American and French revolutions to affirm symbolically a national revolutionary heritage and to rally larger numbers of citizens to fight against the perceived decline of liberty in the Old and New worlds.

Chapter 2

The Opportunity: Civic Days, Liberty Caps, and the Festive Culture of Opposition

On July 4, 1793, Philadelphians awoke to the sound of the “morning gun,” ushering in the seventeenth year of American Independence. At noon, a number of local militia corps made their appearance, firing twelve pounders fifteen times. The militia corps as well as “hundreds of societies and parties” dispersed for their afternoon festivities both in and outside of Philadelphia. Joined by the militia, the Federalist-dominated Society of the Cincinnati gathered at Oeller’s Hotel. With each of their sentiments accompanied by fifteen rounds of canon-fire, the Society toasted “The Day” and the “The President” in hopes that their festivities would serve as “a testimonial to triumphant patriotism.” In addition to praising “national prosperity” as well as “American hospitality,” celebrants raised their glasses once to the Republic of France, expressing “Sympathy to her misfortunes; Praise for her virtues; and triumph for her valor.”

Just three-quarters of a mile away, the French Patriotic Society gathered with their Democratic-Republican supporters at a far less opulent locale: George Leshner’s tavern on North 2nd Street.¹ Although the French Patriotic Society, too, began with a tribute to “The day we celebrate,” the toasts quickly turned to praise for the “The Declaration of July 4, 1776,” “The Democratic Societies of Pennsylvania,” and “The Perpetual Union between the French republic and the United States of America.” In preparation for the celebration, the society had decorated the tavern to express visually the union of

¹ The French Society of the Friends of Liberty and Equality (sometimes called the French Patriotic Society) was a pro-revolutionary organization of French émigrés in Philadelphia founded in January 1793 to collect subscriptions in support of the French Army, to monitor the conduct of French officials and refugees, and to celebrate the American-Franco Alliance. Koschnik, “*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*,” 24.

American and French republics: the room was adorned “with the French and American colours, joining under a cap of liberty on which the national cockade was fixed.”

Following their exuberant celebration at Leshner’s tavern, Democratic-Republicans joined their Federalist adversaries to crown the day with “a grand display of Fire-works, in Market near Ninth street.”

The seemingly “innocent amusement and joyful festivity” that marked Philadelphia’s public 1793 Fourth of July ceremonies belie the increasingly partisan nature of festive rites in the United States. Although the 1793 anniversary of independence was “more extensively celebrated this year than usual,” increased popular participation came with an increased political polarization that would become the hallmark of Independence Day celebrations in the mid-1790s.² Celebrations, such as those at Leshner’s tavern, grew both in size and in number of explicit references to France, while liberty caps, poles, and trees as well as French cockades reappeared. As a result, the celebrations redefined the meanings of the American Revolution’s legacy and carved out a new public space for discussion of opposition politics. Democratic-Republicans, however, did not confine their celebrations of the French and American revolutions to July 4. Between 1793 and early 1796, Democratic-Republicans vastly expanded Philadelphians’ festive calendars to include impromptu civic day fetes as well as celebrations of French military victories and constitutional holidays.

² The preceding account was pieced together from the following news reports: *Federal Gazette*, July 5, 1793; *General Advertiser*, July 6, 1793; and *Gazette of the United States*, July 6 and 10, 1793.

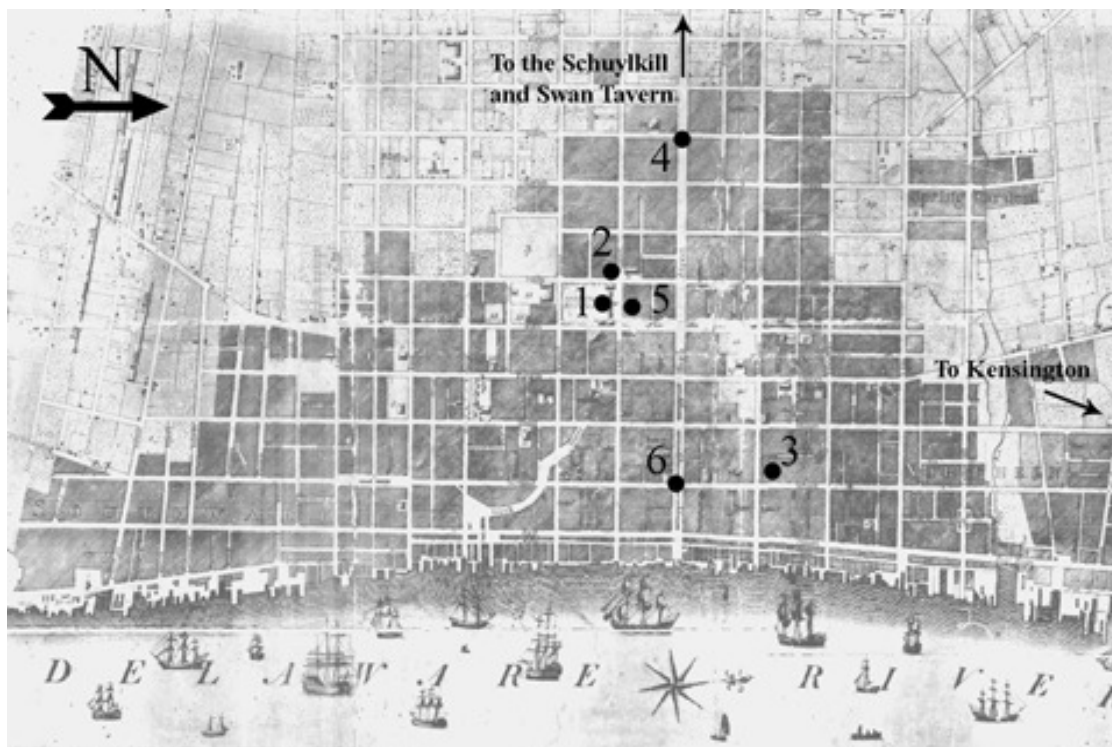


Figure 1. Detail, Benjamin Davis, *Some account of the city Philadelphia*, 1794. Modified by the Author.

KEY:

1. Philadelphia State House
2. Oeller's Hotel
3. George Leshor's Tavern

4. July 4 fireworks, 1793
5. Jay Treaty protest, 1794
6. Dem-Rep/City Cavalry confrontation, 1795

Accounts of Philadelphia's Federalist, Democratic-Republican, and independent newspapers attest to the centrality of the French Revolution to Democratic-Republican festive culture.³ The mere appearance of these celebrations throughout the year does little to explain their connection to emerging Democratic-Republican political ideology. Precisely how Democratic-Republicans wove both explicit and implicit references to France into the material culture and rhetoric of events celebrating French and American

³ In all possible instances, I have attempted to find both Federalist and Democratic-Republican accounts of Independence Day as well as exclusively Democratic-Republican celebrations in order to ensure accuracy in my descriptions.

independence yields a far more accurate understanding of how the Democratic-Republican opposition understood itself in the context of the French Revolution.

Most fundamentally, Democratic-Republicans' talk of the American Revolution's political liberalism, universality, and enduring significance necessitated a discussion of France's revolution—one rooted in similar principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. To avoid the French Revolution would constitute a problematic ideological inconsistency for the opposition party. The frequency, intensity, and directness of Democratic-Republicans' allusions to France in their civic days and Fourth of July celebrations, however, suggest that the temporal proximity of the French Revolution to the development of Democratic-Republicanism alone does not explain the French presence in the movement's festive culture. Evidence thus suggests that there existed a deeper meaning behind Democratic-Republicans' frequent invocations of the French Revolution during their political holidays. Indeed, Democratic-Republicans shared a deep ideological affinity with the principles of the French Revolution and sought to portray the universality of their platforms through references to their "sister republic." Each success of the French Republic seemed to further legitimize the Democratic-Republican conception of democratic revolution as an ongoing phenomenon.⁴

As early Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia sought to expand their party beyond the confines of society meetings they began to integrate the French Revolution's rich set of symbols and celebrations with American patriotic imagery and holidays. The resulting festive culture allowed Democratic-Republicans to challenge Federalist domination of national rites, turning both impromptu civic festivals and the Fourth of

⁴ For the French Revolution as a legitimizing force in Federalist-era politics, see Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 309.

July itself into celebrations of American radicalism and the progress of democratic revolution in Europe. In doing so, Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans successfully rallied a host of individuals to their cause and further expanded the populist dimensions of their political movement. These participants envisioned themselves as taking part in a much larger movement for democracy, which legitimized their roles as important political actors and confirmed their fears of Federalist conservatism.

The French Revolution in Symbols and Signals

When meeting at the German Lutheran School House or at the University of Pennsylvania, members of the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania employed an exclusively verbal arsenal in their oral and written attacks on Federalism. Early national festivities, however, were as much visual affairs as they were stages for rhetorical feats. Whether an American flag or national cockade, signs used by both Federalists and Democratic-Republicans in their public celebrations created an extensive nonverbal language with which they could efficiently communicate to observers. Democratic-Republicans, however, did not simply replace Federalist signs, but sought to reappropriate existing signs to their own cause.

Further investigation of how the visual elements of these public celebrations changed requires a more specific terminology to describe alterations in the relationship between observer and object. The term sign (anything conveying a general meaning) can be subdivided into two categories: symbols and signals. A symbol relays factual information, often serving as a substitute for a behavior or other symbol. Alternatively, a

signal is a sign that “expects or requires a response” from the observer.⁵ According to this dichotomy, a symbol would include a black mourning dress used to express an individual’s state of grief. A directional plaque on a road, however, constitutes a signal, demanding a particular response on the part of the driver. Rather than simply imbue existing objects with new symbolic meanings, Democratic-Republicans transformed public spaces into dynamic and participatory environments by turning existing symbols into signals for political opposition and defiance.⁶

By the dawn of Democratic-Republicanism in early 1793, Federalists had already appropriated the meanings of symbols traditionally associated with the American Revolution. Just as the meaning of the revolution varied according to Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, so did each group attempt to impose their own interpretations of the revolution on objects associated with American Independence. Prior to 1793, flags, union cockades, and other national symbols had come to embody the Federalist notion “T’is done.”⁷ National symbols when displayed publically without supporting context by default constituted a patriotic allusion to the Washington administration and, by implication, an allegiance to the Federalist Party. Although Democratic-Republicans could contest the meaning of these symbols by displaying them in the context of verbal criticisms of Federalism, to a distant observer the objects would still conjure up patriotic thoughts of the United States government. Democratic-Republicans thus faced a

⁵ See Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 101-106; the theory of signs, symbols, and signals presented here and in *Celebrating the Fourth* very closely approximates that of Charles Morris as summarized by Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 65-66.

⁶ Here I depart somewhat from Traver’s analysis of changing symbols of the 1790s by suggesting that rather than simply reshaping existing symbols, Democratic-Republicans redefined Federalist symbols as signals.

⁷ Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 90.

potentially crippling problem when employing existing visual language in their festivities. At best, national symbols, such as the eagle or black union cockades, would be associated with Democratic-Republicans only within the context of a partisan event; at worst, the public would misconstrue to objects as signifying a bond between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans.

The meaning of the French Revolution was far less disputed. Both Federalists and Democratic-Republicans interpreted events in France as a radical democratic movement inspired by their own struggle for independence—although with varying levels of support. To the Philadelphian of the early and mid-1790s, France was a radical experiment in democracy. Any reference on the part of Federalists or Democratic-Republicans to France instantly conveyed the themes of political liberalism and the spread of democracy abroad, which encapsulated the core ideology of Democratic-Republicanism. Many Americans recognized that the meaning of the French Revolution had become entwined in struggles over the direction of American politics.⁸ Indeed, throughout the decade, few Americans disputed the fact that the French Revolution constituted a radical political movement. At the same time, symbols of the French Revolution still carried an element of vagueness beyond their association with the large concepts of democracy and liberalism. This required Democratic-Republicans to define more precisely the meanings of objects associated with the revolution in order to maximize their effectiveness in domestic celebrations. Thus, political organizations—including the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, the German Republican Society, and the French Patriotic Society—refined the symbolic meaning of the French Revolution on both verbal as well as visual levels.

⁸ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 176-177.

Prepared toasts and impromptu voluntaries served as the centerpiece of the Fourth of July, civic days, and other patriotic festivals throughout the early national period. As the Marquis de Chastellux noted during his visit to Philadelphia in 1780, public toasts had “a marked connection with politics.”⁹ Generally, the public toast was the art of expressing relatively uncontroversial statements with stylistic flair. Individuals frequently used toasts to promote an atmosphere that “identified and built upon what a society had in common” in an attempt to draw individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds together.¹⁰ In the 1790s, Democratic-Republicans, like their counterparts across the Atlantic, increased the political overtones of the toast. The resulting toasts became crucial statements of party ideology and served as the first step in intensifying the political meanings of popular celebrations.¹¹ Thus, when the French Patriotic Society toasted “The democratic societies of Pennsylvania, & all those instituted in France and the United States on the same principles,” the society meant to bind publically both American and French revolutionaries through a familiar patriotic ritual. Beyond simply establishing social and political commonalities between the United States and her sister republic, Democratic-Republican toasts served as a call to arms, a signal for all those present to carry themselves with republicans’ characteristic “simplicity” and “sobriety.” Other toasts included more specific orders, encouraging those in attendance to pressure the American government to “faithfully fulfill her treaties, teach even England to execute her’s.”¹² Within the context of inclusive celebrations, toasts could rally a diverse cohort

⁹ Quoted in Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-99.

¹¹ James Epstein, “Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity,” *Albion* 20, No. 2 (1988): 273-276.

¹² *General Advertiser*, July 6, 1793.

of citizens to Democratic-Republican ideology, while inspiring them to join the popular societies in their political crusade against the spread of tyranny at home and abroad.

Despite the immediate effectiveness of rhetorical tools, toasts and speeches were limited in their communicative ability. Toasts and voluntaries offered during meals or at the beginning of the day's festivities lasted for no more than thirty minutes and reached only the present audience. The physical objects that appeared in Democratic-Republican festivities served as a visual shorthand of toasts', voluntaries', and speeches' ideological content. In celebrating the continuity of the American Revolution, festival organizers looked to the traditional symbols of liberal revolution. The most popular objects included liberty caps, liberty poles, and liberty trees as well as the tri-color cockades and the flags of republican states. Americans had abandoned these traditional symbols of liberty following their revolution; on three occasions during the war for independence Congress voted against including the cap of liberty on the national seal.¹³ Unlike the images of the American Revolution that Federalists integrated into the visual representations of their national political culture, the liberty cap, pole, and tree retained their classical meanings of freedom and, more recently, democracy.¹⁴

Despite their unchallenged liberal meanings, the broad connotations of the symbols revived by Democratic-Republicans were potentially problematic. Cosmopolitan Philadelphians of the 1790s knew about the history of the liberty cap, pole, and tree—a long tradition, revived from antiquity by the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, transmitted to England in the seventeenth century, passed on to American patriots, and

¹³ Yvonne Korshak, "The Liberty Cap as a Revolutionary Symbol in America and France," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 1, No. 2 (1987): 60-61.

¹⁴ J. Davis Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," *Past and Present* No. 145 (1995): 72-75.

shortly thereafter taken up in France.¹⁵ Without proper context, raising a liberty pole topped by a scarlet cap could ostensibly refer to any democratic movement of the early modern age. Moreover, the vast majority of Philadelphians, personally familiar with liberty caps, poles, and trees, would far more likely associate the traditional symbols of revolt with their own domestic revolution than an international tradition of liberalism. Although this certainly aligned with Democratic-Republicans' domestic policies, such a narrow association would deny the international components of their political ideology.

The French's ubiquitous employment of liberty caps, poles, and trees in the visual culture of their own revolution helped to forge a dual association for Philadelphians. With news of French legislative debates, military victories, and the progressive "liberation" of Europe, the traditional emblems of the struggle for liberty became increasingly associated with the progress of the French Revolution. When Philadelphians failed to equate these symbols with France, toasts provided rhetorical clarification by associating these objects with praise for both the French and American republican cause. Guests at Democratic-Republican celebrations would thus come to visualize the traditional symbols of liberty as representations of both a domestic and international phenomenon bound together by common republican ideologies.

The progression of the French Revolution throughout the 1790s gave vitality to its rhetorical as well as visual representations used by Democratic-Republicans. By joining the flags of America and France under a liberty cap in their 1793 Fourth of July celebrations, Democratic-Republicans did not simply commemorate the successes of their past revolt against English tyranny, but also pledged themselves to an international revolutionary struggle. Within the context of a Democratic-Republican festival, raising a

¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

liberty pole became a widely recognized signal, provoking a strong political response.¹⁶ This even differed from America's own revolutionary heritage, in which the liberty trees and liberty poles served as commemorative symbols for past events (such as recent executions) rather than prescriptive calls to arms or active demonstrations of allegiance.¹⁷ The icons of Democratic-Republican celebrations thus emerged as a synthesis of familiar forms with new meanings derived from both the ritual of the French Revolution and the presence of that revolution in the American consciousness.

The symbols of the French Revolution provided an appealing visual framework for the expression of Democratic-Republican ideology. In addition to establishing a tangible bridge between the American and French revolutions, these symbols derived their effectiveness from their ability to convey a widely understood political meaning. These icons also served as a proscriptive force, rallying participants to arms against the spread of monarchical tyranny domestically and abroad. These two functions allowed Democratic-Republicans to refashion existing American festivals into dynamic political events and to emphasize further both the urgency and legitimacy of their cause through the celebration of various French revolutionary holidays and victories.

¹⁶ Scholars of the uses of the liberty cap and pole in nineteenth century England have similarly come to view these objects of the French Revolution as intensely political signals in the context of opposition rallies. See, for example, James Eptain, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, No. 122 (1989): 77-84.

¹⁷ For the liberty tree and liberty pole as reflections of revolutionary progress, see Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 180-184.

The French Rites of Independence Day

No date on the American festive calendar of the 1790s held greater significance than the Fourth of July. Prior to the mid-1790s, Federalist ideology had occupied center stage at Independence Day festivities. During the highly choreographed events, Federalists cast the holiday as a patriotic celebration of the American Revolution's culmination. Democratic-Republicans began challenging the myopic nature of this American festive rite by the mid-1790s. In the hands of the opposition, Independence Day became far larger and more exuberant, drawing unprecedented crowds of Philadelphians.¹⁸ These large, public celebrations helped to rally to Democratic-Republicanism a diverse group of individuals who were typically excluded from Federalist processions and Masonic rites.

Democratic-Republican celebrations of the Fourth of the July focused more on reminding Americans of the French and American revolutions' common heritage than any of their other public feasts or festivals, for it was on Independence Day that Democratic-Republican and Federalist conceptions of the United States' legacy in the age of revolutions came into sharper contrast.¹⁹ The French Revolution thus provided Democratic-Republicans with the means to capture and alter the meaning of Independence Day, transforming the holiday into a celebration of revolutionary progress.

Although the French Patriotic Society's July 4, 1793 gathering at Leshner's tavern established the model for future Democratic-Republican Independence Day rituals, the

¹⁸ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 89-91.

¹⁹ For Independence Day as a setting for direct encounters between Federalist and Democratic-Republican interpretations of the American Revolution's heritage, see Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 94-95.

1794 celebration was the first in which the Democratic Society of Philadelphia played the most active role preparing and directing the festivities. On June 19, 1794 the society met to form a Committee of Arrangement to “report a mode of celebrating the approaching Birthday of American Independence” and to “make the necessary preparations, draw up a list of Toasts, fix upon a place and hour of meeting, give due notice thereof, and preside at the Feast.”²⁰ At the following meeting, the society ordered the Committee to extend formal invitations to the German Republican Society and the French Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality in Philadelphia; members of the Democratic Society were at liberty to bring two friends to the formal celebration, so long as each guest paid a two-dollar subscription.²¹

At three o’clock on July 4, the societies as well as a number of other “patriotic citizens” gathered for their formal dinner at Dally’s Hotel for a “handsome repast.” Following the meal, the society members approved the Committee of Arrangement’s fifteen toasts with “the loudest applause.” Foremost on the list was a toast to “the patriotic band who broke the fetters of tyranny by the declaration of Independence” followed by a toast to “the champions of liberty, the officers and soldiers of the late American army.” In addition to celebrating their domestic tradition of liberty, the societies toasted their “brethren, the San Culottes of France,” in hopes that “the temple of liberty they are erecting have the whole earth for its area, and the arch of heaven for its

²⁰ The seven-member committee included the president and vice-presidents of the society as well as citizens Leib, Ferguson, Bache, and Porter. “Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Thursday, June 19, 1794,” in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 86-87.

²¹ “Meeting Minutes, Thursday June 19” and “Thursday, June 26,” in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 86-87.

dome.”²² Although the *Sans Culottes* constituted the only direct reference to the French Revolution among the society’s fifteen toasts—one other toast sympathized with the “late victims of British tyranny” and another with the “patriots of Poland”—three voluntaries offered by those in attendance created direct associations between the present celebration and the French Revolution. The first of the three extolled the “Jacobin Clubs of America,” while the second praised “the army and navy of the French Republic.”²³

The ability of the Democratic-Republicans to transform Fourth of July celebrations into active political affairs derived from their ability to relate the vague architecture of their universal, liberal platforms to specific domestic issues appealing to an array of Philadelphians. Amid toasts to the French Republic and the legacy of the American Revolution, the Democratic-Republicans gathered at Dally’s Hotel raised their glasses against the “baneful” and “exotic” Whiskey Excise. They sympathized with Pennsylvania’s agrarian population, toasting “Agriculture: may the interests of our western brethren never be sacrificed for the benefit of a mercantile junto.” At the same time, the societies extolled urban manufacturers’ abilities to “speedily render us independent of [Britain].”²⁴ In toasting both farmers and manufacturers, the Democratic-Republicans united two seemingly disparate segments of the population under the French and American flags and the lofty ideals of freedom the two represented.²⁵

²² The “San Culottes” were known as the poorer members of the Third Estate who wore pantaloons instead of the more aristocratic culottes. They were considered the most ardent supporters of the Revolution. Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 417n.

²³ *General Advertiser*, July 5, 1794; *American Daily Advertiser*, July 7, 1794; *Independent Gazetteer*, July 9, 1794.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 85.

The socioeconomic diversity of attendees distinguished Democratic-Republican Independence Day festivities from competing Federalist celebrations. The Democratic-Republican events staged in hotels boasted a more democratic composition: in addition to the ranking members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, mariners and laborers, varying levels of artisans and merchants, as well as wealthier manufacturers attended the celebration at Dally's Hotel.²⁶ The society's afternoon dinner, however, constituted only a small portion of the day's festivities. Unlike Federalist civic feasts, of which more than three-quarters took place in lavish hotels and inns, over half of all Democratic-Republican Independence Day events occurred in open air and were accessible to all of Philadelphia's residents. Another third of oppositional celebrations were held in relatively modest taverns.²⁷

Although in the years preceding 1794, many of the city's militias had participated in Federalist processions, Democratic-Republicanism, with its emphasis on equal access to public discourse, offered a far more appealing and less deferential alternative.²⁸ Following their morning voluntaries to usher in the day of celebration, the officers of the 2nd Regiment of Philadelphia met at the Swan Tavern on the banks of the Schuylkill to toast American and French independence. In the context of the Democratic-Republican ideology espoused by popular societies, the militias played an important symbolic role as the inheritors of the democratic cause and defenders of American liberty—a role that was

²⁶ Although attendance records for the dinner do not exist, we can reasonably assume that the dinner, open to all member of the society and their closest friends, would be at least as diverse as the membership rolls of the society itself.

²⁷ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 89.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

equally appealing to officers of the locally organized militia companies.²⁹ The regiment offered the toast, “May the principles that dictated the [American Revolution], ever be supported by the people.”³⁰ Other volunteer companies explicitly rejected Federalist hierarchies: “[may] principles and not men ever be the object of republican attachment.”³¹ Indeed, these companies found themselves drawn to Democratic-Republicans’ staunch anti-monarchism, fearing that Federalists’ emphasis on individual national heroes constituted a dangerous move backward toward the British system of rigid social and political deference.³² Through their own smaller celebrations, these militias were able to situate themselves within a larger Democratic-Republican framework, while directly participating in its development.

The transformations that occurred in the structure and character of the Independence Day celebrations in 1793 and 1794 culminated in the intensely political 1795 Fourth of July. In protesting the ratified Jay Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Britain, Democratic-Republicans opted for a solemn day of mourning. As one reporter for the *Independent Gazetteer* wrote, “[the day] appeared more like the interment of its freedom than the anniversary of its birth.”³³ For Democratic-Republicans, the treaty confirmed what they had feared with Washington’s declaration of neutrality in 1793: Federalists had been slowly moving to bring the United States under British control. The

²⁹ These locally organized militias in the United States had a history of democratic organization stretching back to the Revolution, during which they resisted any attempts by the Continental Congress to impose rigid hierarchies or deference to officers. See Michael A. McDonnell, “Popular Mobilization and Political Culture in Revolutionary Virginia: The Failure of the Minutemen and the Revolution from Below,” *Journal of American History* 85, No. 3 (1998): 948-951.

³⁰ *General Advertiser*, July 8, 1794.

³¹ Quoted in Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 90.

³² Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy* (New York: Norton, 2005), 58.

³³ *Independent Gazetteer*, July 8, 1795.

Jay Treaty seemed to constitute the final step in a long, premeditated Federalist plot, and Democratic-Republicans rallied nearly all their political capital in 1795 to publically demonstrate their resentment.³⁴

The day began with a battery from a “loud mouthed” volunteer artillery commanded by Captain Woodside, whose rounds “like a great trumpet on Jubilee morn, proclaimed the approaching day.” Following their morning exercises, the company gathered at a private residence where the Declaration of Independence was read aloud followed by toasts to the president and vice-president, cautioning the executive to “always remember that they are representatives of a free people.” Following the set of fifteen toasts and six volunteers, all praising the republics of America, France, and Holland in hopes “that the principles of their union in the cause of liberty be to the nations of the world as the centre of gravity,” the artillery company broke into song:

Save the brave Sans Culotte pursuing, and the
victorious carmagnole.
Spread death and carnage round them,
where'er the thund'ring cannon roll;
Their cause is thine America, they fight your
battles o'er and o'er;
Th' avenging sword they'll never sheath till
Kings and tyrants be no more.
Then let our hearts unite in Freedom's
glorious cause . . .

³⁴ Philadelphia Democratic-Republicans had coordinated a protest against Jay Treaty prior to 1795. In June of 1794, for example, they provided a “vivid demonstration” of their opposition to Washington’s appointment of Chief Justice Johns Jay as head of the special envoy to Great Britain. The demonstrators paraded an effigy of Jay stuffed with gunpowder paraded to the pillory by the State House, where Democratic-Republicans spent several hours jeering the figure. Several hours later, “they took it down, solemnly guillotined it and set the clothes afire.” Frank Monaghan, *Johns Jay: Defender of Liberty* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1935), 388-389.

Composed to the tune of the French *La Marseillaise*, the artillery men's song perfectly articulated the hopes as well as fears of Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans, who would undoubtedly have recognized the tune as the rallying call of the *fédérés*—the volunteer troops of the French National Guard formed in the summer of 1792. Like most Democratic-Republicans, the volunteer artilleries and militia envisioned the growing popularity of the domestic opposition in conjunction with the victories of France as bringing about a democratic millennium where “every man will enjoy a peaceful Jubilee.”³⁵

The Jay Treaty threatened to derail progress toward a democratic millennium by subjugating the United States to its former colonial ruler. After the morning voluntaries, civic gatherings, and feasts drew to a close, Democratic-Republicans met to perform their sober protest. The parade gathered at Kensington where artisans and carpenters assembled a transparent painting of Jay. In his right hand, the figure held a pair of scales with “*American liberty and independence*” written on one side and “*British gold*” kicking the beam “in the extreme preponderance.” Jay's left hand held the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, which he extended to a group of senators “who were grinning with pleasure and grasping at the Treaty.” Finally, a label unfurling from the emissary's mouth read “*Come up to my price and I will sell you my Country.*” From Kensington, the procession moved “with great solemnity” down to the center of the city at Second and Market Streets. Having heard rumors that the parade intended to burn the patchwork Jay in effigy before the presidential residence, Washington brought out the City Cavalry, which stopped the parade at Market Street. The demonstrators then turned

³⁵ *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 6, 1795.

and continued back to Kensington, where they finished their “peaceably conducted” demonstration by burning the portrait “amid the acclamation of hundreds of citizens.”³⁶

Although its route had been cut short, the motley crew of Democratic-Republicans had made a bold statement. Their path had taken them through both artisan and laborer neighborhoods that Democratic-Republicans were wresting from Federalist control.³⁷ Moreover, the political tension caused by the standoff between the protestors and City Cavalry functioned as common experience for those in attendance. Throughout the day, Democratic-Republicans expressed their defiance by sporting the tricolor cockade of the French Republic in clear defiance of Federalists wearing the national cockade (a black rosette standardized by Congress).³⁸ Maintaining the peace and symbolic meaning of their protest was a shared victory against Federalist intimidation not just for the demonstrators themselves, but also for those who pledged themselves to the Democratic-Republican cause by wearing the tricolor of France.

By the end of the Democratic-Republicans’ 1795 Independence Day celebrations, allusions to the French Revolution, both visually and rhetorically, became the central features of Democratic-Republican festive culture. Toasts honoring France, tricolor cockades, and liberty caps joining the French and American flags provided a clear sign of the party’s dedication to political radicalism and to the spirit of the American Revolution both at home and abroad. Moreover, by using familiar symbols such as the liberty cap in the context of American and French colors, as well as corresponding toasts, Democratic-Republicans were able to reclaim the visual heritage of the American Revolution as well

³⁶ The proceeding account was pieced together from Monaghan, *John Jay*, 391-392; and *Independent Gazetteer*, July 8, 1795.

³⁷ Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 97-99.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

as to forge a bridge between the their own and the French struggle for liberty. This visual heritage, with its implicit meanings of democracy and freedom, resonated with Americans who saw themselves as participating in the revival of the continuing American Revolution.

Revolutionary Holidays and Civic Festivals

While it constituted the largest and most well attended public event of the year, the Fourth of July represented only a single celebration on the extensive festive calendar of early Democratic-Republicans. These other impromptu Democratic-Republican rites can be divided into three basic categories: celebrations of French dignitaries, celebrations of French anniversaries, and civic festivals. All three types of celebrations not only gave Democratic-Republicans' cause increased legitimacy but additionally provided opportunities for creating and rallying support for Democratic-Republican Party ideology in a public setting. Indeed, the sheer number of French Revolutionary holidays and military victories allowed Democratic-Republicans to celebrate their sister republic year-round, which in turn allowed them to establish Europe's democratic revolutions in the minds of their fellow citizens as a continuously unfurling event and very present reality.

The vast majority of impromptu Democratic-Republican celebrations would appear to the French Minister and officers in attendance as similar to the controlled Federative Festivals held in revolutionary France. They were generally organized in character and absorbed differences between attendees. Although less militaristic than those conducted in France, Democratic-Republican celebrations of the French

Revolution's progress emphasized common cause through a number of activities—including speeches, blessings of flags, and oaths—in public spaces throughout Philadelphia.³⁹ The leaders of the Democratic-Republicans who organized these events knew exactly how to represent the French Revolution in America: in addition to news reports, Philadelphia's large population of French émigrés likely informed Democratic-Republican's strategic use of symbols and French patriotic rituals.⁴⁰ Upon hearing of various French festivals, leaders of the Democratic-Republican movement likely adapted the Festivals of Federation for their deeply symbolic political and celebratory, rather than raucous, nature. These were carefully choreographed festivals where Democratic-Republicans crafted and affirmed party ideology among their own members and other citizens who joined in the toasts, processions, and revelry.

The first celebrations that can be called “Democratic-Republican” honored the French Minister Citizen Genêt following his May 1793 arrival in Philadelphia. Although Genêt's arrival predated the formation of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania by two weeks, a committee appointed by the German Republican Society held a formal reception, during which they entertained a speech by the newly appointed Minister.⁴¹ In anticipation of the event, a correspondent for the *National Gazette*, hoped that “true republicans of this country” would display their patriotism by hoisting “the three

³⁹ For the development of Federative Festivals in 1790s France, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 39-42 and 54-62.

⁴⁰ Philadelphia was home to the United States' largest population of French émigrés. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 135-136. Historians have estimated the city's French population in the 1790s to be as low as ten thousand and as high as twenty-five thousand. According to John Earl, approximately one in ten Philadelphians at the time were French. John L. Earl, “Talleyrand in Philadelphia, 1794-1796,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91, No. 3 (1967): 283-284.

⁴¹ *National Gazette*, May, 22, 1793.

coloured flag, the emblem of patriotism,” and would “decorate their elegant persons” by “adorn[ing] their hair with patriotic ribbons on the occasion.”⁴² Following the initial reception of Genêt by the German Republican Society, Democratic-Republicans gathered with the governor of Pennsylvania to toast the everlasting unity of the American and French Republics, which was received by a hearty twenty-one cheers.⁴³

Between 1793 and 1796, French ministers and officials played central roles in celebrations of the French Republic that were meant to illustrate the American Revolution’s international legacy as well as to lend legitimacy to the Democratic-Republican cause.⁴⁴ As one reporter for the *National Gazette* noted in 1793, “THE mercury of republicanism in this city seems to rise and fall with the good or bad fortune of France.”⁴⁵ During this period, 1795 was a particularly fruitful year for feasts held in honor of European Democracy, for the proclamation of the Batavian Republic in January marked the foundation of another “sister republic” in Europe. In early January of 1795, advertisements published in both the *Aurora* and *Independent Gazetteer* announced a “national civic festival” in honor of the liberation of South Prussia—likely referencing the Kościuszko Uprising of 1794.⁴⁶ On April 22, Democratic-Republicans set another day aside for a celebration of the French military. At ten o’clock “a discharge of fifteen guns gave the signal for assembling in the centre square,” from which citizens “proceeded with the flags of the three Republics to the garden of the minister of the French Republic.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, April 10, 1793.

⁴³ *Philadelphische Correspondenz*, May 31, 1793.

⁴⁴ The use of French Ministers in Democratic-Republican celebrations parallels Federalist attempts to lend their cause legitimacy by invoking the name of George Washington and other heroes of the Revolution. For Federalist use of Washington’s approval to gain popular support for Hamiltonian policies, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 145-147.

⁴⁵ *National Gazette*, April 20, 1793.

⁴⁶ *Aurora*, January 13, 1795; *Independent Gazetteer*, January 14, 1795.

Having arrived at the garden, the party erected an altar “on which the Statue of Liberty was placed.” Citizens then surrounded their monument, singing the “hymn of Liberty” before “with one voice” taking the oath “*to live free or die!*” The crowd of more than 400 citizens then reconvened at Oeller’s Hotel where they toasted “The Eighteenth Century—May the revolutions, which it has given birth to know no limits but the utmost boundaries of the earth, and its close be the end of despotism.”⁴⁷ Similar festivals continued throughout the calendar year, the next drawing a crowd of 200 and taking place again at Oeller’s in May.⁴⁸

Democratic-Republicans additionally held a number of celebrations at less opulent locales, incorporating a number of “lower-sort” artisans, laborers, and seamen into their movement. On February 27, 1796 the Dutch Consul gathered with a fairly large crowd at the Philadelphia docks, where “a civic board was decorated with a liberty tree, being an ever-green, the cap of liberty projecting out on the top, and the flags of the Batavian, French, and American Republics, encircled with a wreath of flowers, appeared out on its branches.”⁴⁹ The fledging opposition united a diverse group of artisans and merchants, laborers, and gentlemen through their participation in common celebratory rites. For example, many of these ceremonies concluded with singing patriotic hymns, including *La Marseillaise*, emphasizing the urgency of their common cause in defending their freedoms.⁵⁰

The largest and most inclusive impromptu Democratic-Republican celebrations were the civic days arranged by the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania and her “sister”

⁴⁷ *Independent Gazetteer*, April 22, 1795.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1795.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, February 27, 1796.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *General Advertiser*, June 4 and 15, 1793.

German Republican Society, typically announced to celebrate democratic successes in Europe. Although these festivals first began to take place almost immediately after Philadelphia's two Democratic-Republican societies formed in the spring of 1793, the largest civic festival was that of May 1, 1794. The Democratic Society of Pennsylvania began preparations two weeks before the event, resolving that the feast be held "in honor of the victories obtained by the Democrats of France." The society intended the event to be a joint effort among Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans. As such, they solicited the German Republican Society "to join us in [t]he foregoing measure, and appoint Committees to concur in the management."⁵¹ Three of the event's seven managers—Henry Kämmerer, Andrew Geyer, and George Forepaugh—hailed from the German Republican Society, and Peter Muhlenberg joined Democratic Society of Pennsylvania members Alexander Dallas and Michael Leib to draw up a list of toasts and sentiments.⁵²

The elaborate display of patriotism began mid-morning at Democratic Society of Pennsylvania member citizen Israel Israel's house, which was decorated with the flags of the American and French Republics among other familiar revolutionary ornaments. The publically stated purpose of the feast was to "celebrate those events which so eminently conduced to consolidate French liberty and guarantee our own independence."⁵³

According to multiple reports of the event, the Democratic-Republican governor of Pennsylvania along with the minister and several officers of the French Republic attended the feast in addition to over 800 citizens, representing nearly one tenth the adult male

⁵¹ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, April 17, 1794.

⁵² Although Leib also served as secretary of the German Republican Society, he was appointed to the "Committee to prepare Toasts and Sentiments" on behalf of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania. Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, May 1, 1794.

⁵³ *Philadelphia Gazette*, May 3, 1794; and *Independent Gazetteer*, May 7, 1794.

population of Philadelphia.⁵⁴ Together the crowd then drank fifteen toasts “accompanied by universal marks of approbation,” honoring the “the Alliance between the Sister Republics of America and France,” “the Republic of Genoa,” and “a Revolutionary Tribunal in Great Britain,” among other things.⁵⁵

As opposed to the more domestically oriented toasts of Independence Day celebrations, the sentiments expressed at the Civic Day were far more radical and internationally-focused. Democratic-Republicans collectively pledged themselves to a platform of universal rights. Domestically, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania hoped that “their separate Fraternities be absorbed, in One Great Society, comprehending the Human Race.” They envisioned themselves as ultimately bringing together “the Great Family of Mankind” so that “the distinction of nation and of language, be lost in association of Freedom and Friendship.”⁵⁶ These platforms expressed as toasts were not oaths of allegiance. Rather, they served as a means of allowing the public to participate in approving of party ideology among mixed groups of supporters.⁵⁷ The audience’s positive reception of these toasts shows a generally strong sympathy for the French Revolution. Indeed, the universalism inherent to discussing the American, French, and

⁵⁴ This statistic was first calculated by Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 89 and confirmed by Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 32.

⁵⁵ *Philadelphia Gazette*, May 3, 1794; and *Independent Gazetteer*, May 7, 1794.

⁵⁶ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, May 1, 1794.

⁵⁷ Here I disagree with Travers. Democratic-Republicans explicitly delineated toasts from oaths at their celebrations. Whereas an oath serves as an exclusionary force, plainly delineating between those for and against the party, toasts served as a means for pitching party ideology. The level of approbation for any given toast functioned as a vote, not showing approval or disapproval for the party itself, but for a specific platform. In this way, toasts were fundamentally inclusive whereas oaths were exclusionary. Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 95. For an example of Democratic-Republicans differentiated toasts from oaths, see the May 6, 1795 celebration of French victories described above.

other revolutions helped to rally a diverse crowd to the banner of Democratic-Republicanism.

Within exclusively Democratic-Republican celebrations of France, the French Revolution played two distinct roles. Firstly, it provided the cause of liberalism in the United States with an immediacy and legitimacy, while reminding Americans of their own revolution's fragile legacy. Secondly, the French Revolution provided a vehicle for expressing opposition ideology in a coherent, symbolic form. The result stood to "reinvent citizenship on a far more active plane."⁵⁸ Celebrations of the French Revolution provided a public space for formation of Democratic-Republican ideology, where citizens who found themselves concerned by increased conservatism at home and abroad could collectively express their anxieties in a common symbolic language.

Recognizing the deluge of French patriotic signs at Independence Day celebrations, one incensed Federalist artillery company toasted "the American who truly loves his country—may he never suffer the insolence of the imported minions of other nations to detract from the honor of his own."⁵⁹ The presence of French flags, cockades, as well as liberty caps and poles was hardly a unidirectional influence migrating from French to sympathetic American shores. Rather, Democratic-Republicans had actively employed the French Revolution to fashion a unique and instantly-identifiable party identity. Singing songs to the tune of the *La Marseillaise* showed as much allegiance to Democratic-Republicanism as *God Save the King* would imply an allegiance to the

⁵⁸ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 122.

⁵⁹ *Gazette of the United States*, July 10, 1795.

English crown. More importantly, voluntaries and cockades provided Philadelphians with easy access to a dynamic political environment that stressed public participation.

One of the Democratic-Republicans' greatest feats was transforming symbols of the French Revolution into signals for action among festival participants. These signals not only legitimized their cause, but provided an expediency, which helped to rally citizens quickly to the banner of Democratic-Republicanism and the aid of their sister republics. At the same time, the dynamism of the French Revolution as well as the Democratic-Republican emphasis on popular participation in their party politics became just as much a source of tension as it was a foundation of unity among their members. While some viewed the possessions and pageantry of pro-French festivals as peaceful marches of liberty, others feared that the "phrenzy" of Democratic-Republican festive culture produced "adversaries of National Order and Prosperity."⁶⁰ In hearing of the Terror, a number of Philadelphians saw the violent potential of the Democratic-Republican movement and the danger that the same disorders in France might emigrate to the United States.⁶¹ Indeed, what actions symbols of the French Revolution implied quickly became a point of contention within the Democratic-Republican Party.

⁶⁰ Alexander Hamilton, *On the Rise of a War Party*, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. 15, 602.

⁶¹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 177-178; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 56-57; and Buel, *Securing the Revolution*, 37-39.

Chapter Three

The Crisis: Controlling the Image of France and Defining the Limits of Party Ideology

While the symbols used by Democratic-Republicans in their public celebrations did help to clearly delineate the opposition party from Federalism, the success of Democratic-Republican festivities derived from the ability of these symbols to evoke a strong nostalgia for the radicalism of the American Revolution among celebration participants. The symbols and language of Democratic-Republicanism did not convey information as to what beliefs and actions the party specifically implied by extolling “democracy” and “liberalism.” Naturally, these participants imposed their own interpretations of “democracy” and “liberalism” on the terms and symbols of opposition party festivals. As a result, the Democratic-Republicans succeeded in calling a large number of Americans to action against British and Federalist tyranny, who each took the actions he perceived to be implied by his own interpretations of Democratic-Republican ideology. Party leadership quickly realized that the movement needed a mechanism for maintaining the broad appeal of the French Revolution and their corresponding party ideology as well as for controlling what actions they did and did not condone.

The Democratic-Republican opposition used newspapers, pamphlets, and other published materials to control the meaning of the French revolutionary symbols they publically employed at celebrations. From the emergence of the Democratic-Republican societies in 1793 through the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, print constituted an important form of communication for those opposing the Washington and early Adams administrations. Although the technology of printing remained unchanged

throughout the decade—a hand press with a full complement of artisans could usually produce no more than 1,500 copies of a daily four-page newspaper—the number and circulation of Philadelphia newspapers increased dramatically. The average Philadelphian could find copies of the city’s most prominent papers in inns, coffee houses, and taverns, where patrons could discuss the latest domestic and international events.¹

The wide reach of newsprint and other published items during the 1790s made print an attractive medium for Democratic-Republicans, whose movement needed a vehicle for communication with party members outside of their political societies throughout the year. As a partisan press began to develop in the early 1790s with the appearance of the first opposition papers, Democratic-Republicans established “an effective conduit between readers, politicians, and the masses.”² Rather than an ad-hoc compilation of news stories, letters to the editor, and advertisements, the Democratic-Republican newspaper was a carefully executed partisan exercise. Personal correspondence of publishers and newspaper editors, the newspapers themselves, and minutes of Philadelphia’s popular societies provide a relatively complete portrait of Democratic-Republican print culture. Exploring how these publishing enterprises came into being, how partisan editors assembled news and editorial content, and what role the product newspapers played in the context of the larger party structure reveals much about how Democratic-Republicans attempted to control the meaning of the French Revolution.

When printed and distributed, Democratic-Republican publications served two purposes: first, the newspaper allowed Democratic-Republicans to build on existing support for France and their political movement through providing the masses with

¹ Donald Steward, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1969), 17.

²Ibid., 12-13.

information on the state of Europe filtered through partisan editors. In frequently publishing reports that emphasized the quickening pace of the radicalized French Revolution, Democratic-Republicans effectively gave their movement a sense of urgency while dispelling any negative connotations attached to the French Revolution. Moreover, opinion pieces, pamphlets, and other publications allowed Democratic-Republicans to advance their interpretations of French revolutionary events, to which they assigned moral and millennial terms.

Secondly, the press afforded party leaders a system for moderating party ideology. From the outset of the movement, Democratic-Republicanism presented itself as a populist party that drew its platforms from the masses. By passing the liberty cap through crowds at celebrations the Democratic-Republican Party seemed to declare all in attendance political equals. When these men raised their glasses to approve toasts each in attendance saw himself as actively directing the party. The popular celebrations seemed to make every citizen a policy maker within the Democratic-Republican Party structure.³ In the midst of increasing populism and the potential harms of an unwieldy and decentralized political party, newspapers enabled Democratic-Republican leaders to codify which actions they believed were incompatible with party ideology. As a result, Democratic-Republicans could maintain the wide appeal of their political ideology while establishing limits and controlling any potential chaos within the party. The resulting print culture complemented and expanded the means of controlling the meanings of revolutionary terminology established in popular celebrations and further helped Democratic-Republicans rally citizens behind the domestic opposition party to challenge Federalist policy.

³ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 130.

The Partisan Editor

At the center of Democratic-Republican print culture in the early- and mid-1790s stood the partisan editor. These editors, working in close collaboration with the local Democratic-Republican societies, provided an official platform for party beliefs, where society resolutions, accounts of celebrations, spirited toasts, and circular letters could be regularly distributed. These printers, however, were more than simple mouthpieces for local Democratic-Republicans: they were shrewd political actors who used their printing ventures and publications' influence to orchestrate a comprehensive and appealing campaign for the Democratic-Republican Party.

Unlike European states with strictly controlled court presses to manage public opinion of the government, the first governments under the Constitution restricted themselves to encouraging the growth of independent newspapers throughout the country.⁴ Within this deregulated newspaper market, a partisan press quickly took form. John Fenno's staunchly federalist *Gazette of the United States* was the first established partisan newspaper of the early national period and aimed to play the role of the federal government's "official paper." Fenno deliberately intended *Gazette's* content "for the purpose of disseminating favorable sentiments of the federal Constitution and the administration."⁵ The partisan content of Fenno's *Gazette*, however, did far more to encourage the development of a robust Democratic-Republican press than to satisfy Fenno's goal of creating a unified national polity.

⁴ Jeffrey Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 48-50.

⁵ *Gazette of the United States*, June 9, 1792.

In October of 1791 a political counterpoint to the *Gazette of the United States* appeared in the form of Philip Freneau's *National Gazette*, and in mid-March of 1792 the first newspaper war of the early Republic began over Hamilton's financial program. The frequent exchanges between the two publications' editorial and news content not only publically confirmed the growing political divisions in Congress but formalized and generalized those divisions.⁶ Yet these divisions fell along established pro- and anti-administration lines: whereas the *Gazette of the United States* was a product of Hamiltonian Federalist ideology, the *National Gazette* served as a public statement of Jefferson's and Madison's opposition thereto. The papers both provided vehicles for relaying Congressional debates to Philadelphians as well as the greater United States. Although certainly anti-Hamiltonian, Freneau's *National Gazette* never fully developed into what can be called a Democratic-Republican publication.

Beset by increasing financial burdens—including delinquent subscribers and growing out-of-house printing costs—and the sudden outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia, Freneau halted publication of his *National Gazette* in October 1793.⁷ Many of the precedents set by Freneau's *National Gazette* through its heated political quibbling with the *Gazette of the United States* came to define newspaper politics of the early Democratic-Republican Party. The most important of these new paradigms was the increasing separation between editor and established statesmen, whereby the newspaper publisher became independent of political patrons.⁸ Moreover, the *National Gazette* left

⁶ For an excellent account of this first newspaper war, see Elkins and McKittrik, *The Age of Federalism*, 282-292.

⁷ In many cases, Freneau was unable to secure the patronage of elite politicians that Jefferson and his allies had promised the printer from outset of the *Gazette*'s publication. Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 76-78.

⁸ *Ibid.*

behind a vast group of dedicated readers, eager to patronize the next anti-Federalist, and first Democratic-Republican, publication that would take its place: Benjamin Bache's *General Advertiser* (later renamed the *Aurora*).

Much like that of Freneau, Bache's education was far from vocational. Accompanying his grandfather, the esteemed Benjamin Franklin, to pre-revolutionary Europe, Bache received a elite education in France and Switzerland. When he learned the printing trade, he did so under the tutelage of eminent printers and typefounders on his grandfather's state-of-the-art press in Passy. Under the shadow of his grandfather, Bache additionally numbered among his acquaintances many politicians who would soon become leaders of the French Revolution, including the Comte de Mirabeau, Camille Desmoulins, Brisot de Warville, Georges Danton, Jean-Paul Marat, and Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès.⁹ Although Bache would later remark to his father, Richard Bache, that his later financial troubles as editor of the *General Advertiser* extended from having not "been brought up as a man of business," what he believed to be "a considerable disadvantage" would make Bache the most politically prominent Democratic-Republican printer of the 1790s.¹⁰

The young printer's unique education in philosophy, politics, and journalism combined with artisanal training as a printer manifested itself most fully in Bache's first commercial printing venture in the United States: his newspaper the *General Advertiser, and Political Commercial, Agricultural, and Literary Journal*. Bache originally conceived of the newspaper, which began print in October 1790, as a "[vehicle] for every

⁹ For an more complete account of Bache's adolescent years in pre-revolutionary France, see Jeffrey A. Smith, *Franklin and Bache: Envisioning the Enlightened Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 59-62; and Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 80-83.

¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin Bache to Richard Bache, January 10, 1793.

species of information in the *Arts, Sciences, &c.*”¹¹ Despite having been steered away from politics by his grandfather, in 1794, Bache increasingly assumed the role of the general public’s champion against Federalist conservatism and published increasing numbers of political news stories and staunchly anti-administration editorials. In November of 1794, Bache confirmed his paper’s place as a Democratic-Republican and decidedly pro-French publication by renaming the publication the *Aurora and General Advertiser*. According to Bache, the *Aurora* would “diffuse light within the sphere of its influence,—dispel the shades of ignorance, and gloom of error and thus sustain the fair fabric of freedom on its surest foundation, publicity and information.”¹² Bache symbolically enhanced the *General Advertiser*’s previous masthead with a graphic depiction of the aurora borealis with luminous rays ascending from the horizon. Under his visual allusion to Enlightenment, Bache printed the phrase “SURGO UT PROSIM” (translated as “I rise to be useful”). Bache made himself and his publication useful to the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania by joining the society in January of 1794, serving on the society’s Corresponding Committee, and becoming one of the organization’s most active members.¹³ From 1794 onward, Bache’s *Aurora* provided Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republicans with ample space and opportunities to publish party content.

In addition to turning out daily editions of the *Aurora* until his death, Bache published a host of political books and pamphlets, including the first edition of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* in 1791. Throughout the 1790s, Paine and a number of other

¹¹ *General Advertiser*, October 1, 1790.

¹² *Aurora*, November 8, 1794.

¹³ James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1991), 207.

radical writers relied on Bache for their printing needs.¹⁴ Unlike his contemporary printers who usually did not discriminate in the subject matter they published, Bache interested himself only in “books of a particular description”—namely, “any thing of merit in the line of political novelty of a republican cast.”¹⁵ Bache, however, consistently lost money on his printing ventures, including his flagship publication the *Aurora*, believing that it was far more expedient to distribute widely valuable literature—such as the text of the Jay Treaty and Paine’s *Age of Reason*—than to adhere to the economic realities of his industry.¹⁶ Upon Bache’s death in 1798, *Aurora* correspondent and shortly thereafter publisher of the newspaper, William Duane estimated that Bache had “expended a fortune of more than 20,000 dollars” in supporting his publishing ventures.¹⁷ In spending his fortune on his printing business Bache had reshaped opposition print culture by giving priority to Democratic-Republican content and ensuring ideological consistency between his newspaper and other published materials.

Despite his undisputed prominence as the most influential Democratic-Republican printer of the 1790s, Bache published in good company. By the mid-1790s, Democratic-Republican publications outnumbered their Federalist counterparts two to one.¹⁸ Although many of these publishers could not boast Bache’s cosmopolitan education or independent financial security, they strove to advance the Democratic-Republican cause in print. Foreigners or United States citizens with experiences abroad constituted the vast

¹⁴ Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, 98 and 156.

¹⁵ Benjamin Franklin Bache to Charles Debrett, December 3, 1796.

¹⁶ Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*”, 95. For comparison, the *National Gazette* published twice weekly—Wednesdays and Saturdays—with an annual subscription rate of three dollars. The *Aurora* published at three times that rate—Mondays through Saturdays—with an annual subscription cost of six dollars.

¹⁷ Quoted in Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, 159.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

majority of printers with Democratic-Republic allegiances. Next to Bache, the second most prominent Democratic-Republican publisher was British-born Eleazer Oswald. At the age of 15, Oswald moved to the United States, where he apprenticed as a publisher in New York before serving in the American Revolution. In 1793 the then publisher of the staunchly liberal *Independent Gazetteer* left for Europe, writing the National Convention, “the anxiety I felt for the success of the Revolution, determined me . . . to come to France and offer my Services in any manner in which I could be most usefully employed.”¹⁹ Upon his return in early 1794, Oswald joined the Democratic Society of Philadelphia and continued to publish the *Independent Gazetteer* until his death in 1795. Both Oswald’s and Bache’s print shops served as rallying points for political émigrés and exiles throughout the 1790s, the vast majority of whom worked as editors, pamphleteers, and printers in British reform movements prior to their trans-Atlantic passage. These radicals then threw themselves into the Democratic-Republican fight against Federalism, for fear of the same advancing conservative forces that had brought about their exile to America.²⁰

Together with established American printers and editors, radical European émigrés helped to coordinate Democratic-Republican attacks against what they perceived to be Federalist tyranny. In one way or another, European revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements either directly or indirectly influenced nearly all Philadelphia Democratic-Republicans involved in printing. As these artisans rallied against the Washington administration, they created the first partisan newspaper industry. Far more than simple a statement of partisan beliefs, these printers, in conjunction with the

¹⁹ Quoted in Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., “Eleazer Oswald,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Perry J. Ashley, Vol. 43 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1985), 337.

²⁰ Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, 221, 225, and 228-233.

Democratic Societies, used their publications to convey both the immediacy of their cause and to codify party ideology.

Printing the French Revolution

Philadelphians derived their knowledge of the French Revolution primarily from what appeared in local periodicals, pamphlets, and the occasional book. As the number of newspapers and other printed materials burgeoned in the mid-1790s, reports from France, England, Prussia, and a number of other countries engaged in Europe's democratic struggles inundated Philadelphia. Stories of European events filled the pages of the city's newspapers. Objectivity, however, was hardly the norm. As they reported news from Europe, Democratic-Republican editors realized the potential of foreign events to reshape the domestic political landscape. Liberal editors used news reports and opinion pieces as a means to cast the revolution in a positive light in an effort to win support for both the French Revolution and the Democratic-Republican Party. Indeed, by describing the revolution in exaggerated, millennial tones, editors and their authors attempted to legitimize their opposition movement through its association with European revolutions.

Despite the seeming abundance of European news in the Americas, domestic publishers encountered a number of difficulties when approaching foreign news. Regardless of the sources available, there existed a considerable time lapse between European events and corresponding reports in America. Although the National Convention executed King Louis XVI on January 22, the first report of the king's death did not appear in the United States until March 26, published in Philadelphia's *Federal*

Gazette.²¹ More importantly, American editors acquired news of foreign events second-hand. No American newspaper consistently maintained independent reporters in either England or France. Instead, printers relied on European papers, reprinting articles in their entirety or paraphrasing from transcripts of speeches and government records that made their way across the Atlantic.

When reprinting news, Democratic-Republican printers had at best a limited number of sources from which to choose (usually English and some French newspapers). Whereas Federalist papers primarily relied upon colored British accounts of the French Revolution, Bache, Oswald, and their Democratic-Republican contemporaries attempted to balance English reports as reprinted by the Federalist press with excerpts from the proceedings of the National Convention, transcripts of French patriotic speeches, and news from French periodicals.²² Throughout 1793, Bache, for example, relied on his father in London for pro-French newspapers from Europe.²³ Additionally, Jefferson arranged to have copies of the republican-leaning Dutch newspaper *Gazette de Leide* sent to Bache for translation and republication in the *General Advertiser*.²⁴ Those editors not versed in French and unable to procure regular translation were forced either to rely on conservative British periodicals or to reprint English translations appearing in the *General Advertiser*.

Although republican-leaning European periodicals typically cast the French Revolution in a reasonably positive light, Democratic-Republicans still encountered news

²¹ News of the king's death quickly spread, and was reported the following day in the *Gazette of the United States*, the *American Daily Advertiser*, and the *General Advertiser*.

²² Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, 118.

²³ See, for example, Richard Bache to Benjamin Franklin Bache, April 5, 1793 and May 1, 1793.

²⁴ Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, 107.

of violence and turmoil in France and were forced to reconcile “over exaggerated” British reports with their own news coverage. As early as May 1793, the *National Gazette* began printing editorials alongside news content defending the increasing violence in France. An Old Soldier wrote, “no great national change ever took place without the greatest disorder,” reminding Americans that “many violences were committed during the American war among us.” Freneau paired the editorial with a series extracts from recent French newspapers, in which one correspondent remarked of the state of France, “An apparent calm is now prevalent” and that “tranquility . . . seems to be on the gaining hand.”²⁵ Late 1793 and the first months of 1794, however, marked the height of the Terror, and republican editors were forced to defend the virtues of the French Republic amid rising concerns about the future of the French Republic. Editors’ first strategy when engaging tales of French political violence was simply to continue denying the extent of violence in France. In June 1794, a correspondent for the *Philadelphische Correspondenz*, for example, reported that “the political horizon of Europe has now begun to brighten.”²⁶ According to Democratic-Republican journalists, despite the presence of violence and corruption, France’s enlightened revolution could only conceivably move forward. To think otherwise debased their entire conception of democratic revolution and of the oncoming political millennium.

When Democratic-Republican editors could not dismiss the growing instability of the French Republic, they generally applied two strategies: they either described the violence as a temporary delirium from which France would soon recover, or they

²⁵ *National Gazette*, May 11, 1793.

²⁶ *Philadelphische Correspondenz*, June 13, 1794. (My translation.)

redirected praise from the French government to her virtuous people.²⁷ In 1794, Bache began printing copies of Leonard Bourdon's pamphlet *Collection of the Heroic & Civic Actions of the French Republicans*. Originally published as National Convention propaganda, the collection of anecdotes told stories of "the virtuous actions of bodies, of individuals, of old men, of women, and of children," using "no hyperbolic terms, no trivial or fulsome expressions."²⁸ A year later, Bache translated and printed copies of the French Constitution, including the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* as front matter in an effort to show symbolically the presence of order within the French Republic.²⁹ Through printed accounts from France, Democratic-Republicans attempted to restore American confidence in the potential of the French Revolution as well as underscore the commonalities between Americans and the French constitution and citizenry.

At the same time, Democratic-Republicans juxtaposed their discussions of France with accounts of English tyranny. In 1795, Philadelphia publishers used their protests against the Jay Treaty to highlight American and French commonalities, while further differentiating the United States from England. If the United States' republican experiment was to survive, argued Matthew Carey, "then she ought rather to cultivate the friendship of a republic, actuated by a fellow feeling, than the alliance of a monarchy

²⁷ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 137-138n.

²⁸ Leonard Bourdon, *Collection of the Heroic & Civic Actions of the French Republicans, Published by the order of the National Convention*, trans. H.P. Nugent (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin Bache, 1794), 3-4.

²⁹ *Constitution of the French Republic. Offered to the French people, by the National Convention; and ratified by the people, in primary assemblies met. Translated from a correct French original* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin Bache, 1795).



Figure 2. See Porcupine in colours just Protray'd. Moreau de Saint-Méry, Philadelphia, 1796. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

impressed with jealousy and apprehension.”³⁰ Indeed, by aligning themselves with England, even if only commercially, Americans risked the danger “that the government of the United States may be transformed through the medium of treaty-making power, from a republic to an oligarchy.”³¹ In 1796, Moreau de Saint-Méry illustrated the British threat in his political cartoon “See Porcupine in colours just Protray’d” (fig. 2). The Philadelphia artist portrays the vicious Federalist printer William Cobbett as Peter

³⁰ Mathew Carey, *Features of Mr. Jay's Treaty. To Which is Annexed A View of Commerce of the United States as it Stands at Present, and as it is Fixed by Mr. Jay's Treaty* (Philadelphia: Lang & Ustick, 1795), 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

Porcupine (his pseudonym), sowing discord with his pen as a British lion promises the editor a reward for his slander. Liberty, drawn next to a liberty cap and pole, weeps on a memorial to American independence, while a devil close by encourages Porcupine, “More scandal, let us destroy this Idol liberty.” Saint-Méry’s work establishes a physical divide between the good—liberty, surrounded by the symbols of the French and American revolutions—and the bad—English tyranny embodied as a lion and devil trampling on the American flag and liberty caps. Only through the Federalist Porcupine’s trail of slander can the embodiments of British tyranny affect American liberty. Although Carey’s pamphlet and Saint-Méry’s cartoon are hardly news, their imagery gave readers a paradigm for interpreting European news: whereas news reports simply manipulated facts, opinion pieces and cartoons assigned moral imperatives to newspapers’ content.

By providing Philadelphians with news laden with moral sentiments and imperative tones, Democratic-Republican editors effectively bound the legacies and futures of America and France in their papers. Moreover, the frequency with which newspapers provided Philadelphians with engaging news from France seemed to hasten the pace of political changes, embodying “Democratic-Republicans’ belief that millennial time moved more quickly.”³² The quickening pace of political time unsettled the reader by reminding them of American and European liberty’s fragility in the face of subversive Federalist and Tory forces. As a result, news of France helped to reinforce the legitimacy of the Democratic-Republican Party. The movement’s lofty goal of preserving liberty became increasingly grounded in the political realities of Europe and thus relevant to the average Philadelphian.

³² Hale, “On Their Tiptoes,” 198.

The Limits of Popular Democratic-Republicanism

The populist overtones, and resulting popular success, of early Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia did not come without consequences. The party's at times vague rhetoric and relatively decentralized structure allowed individuals to integrate their own political beliefs and practices into those of Democratic-Republicanism. Although early Democratic-Republicans sought to create a diverse, politically active group of followers, discord within the party became increasingly problematic and potentially dangerous. As the nexus of party activity, most democratic newspapers of Philadelphia provided party leaders with a vehicle for moderating party ideology by definitively expressing the limits of Democratic-Republicanism in the United States.³³ In doing so, these leaders hoped to maintain party unity and a modicum of consensus among Democratic-Republicans by explicitly articulating what actions were unacceptable according to party ideology. These reports, which superficially portray unity, belie the party's internal divisions which began to appear and intensify as Democratic-Republicans translated their stated dedications to liberty and democracy into actions.

Leaders of Philadelphia's Democratic-Republican movement strove to codify the meanings of party ideology through editorials and news content. To do so, they drew upon the rich tradition of pseudonyms used by American political writers of the eighteenth century. Normally allusions to classical republican figures, pseudonyms allowed a small group of authors to write under a number of different, recognizable names—a process that seemed to render certain ideas as general opinions reverberating

³³ Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 49.

from many voices.³⁴ Indeed, the structure of the Democratic-Republican discourse centered on printed communication allowed a small number of party leaders “to speak in the guise of the supervising ‘public’” or “to assume the role of the ‘people.’”³⁵ Democratic-Republican authors deliberately employed increasing numbers of non-classical pseudonyms when addressing their middle- and lower-class crowd of supporters. “Cincinnatus,” “Cato,” and the like were replaced by “An Old Soldier,” “The Spirit of ’76,” “An American San Culottes,” and other allusions to America and France’s revolutionary heritages. To readers, these pseudonyms illustrated the continuity between the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and Democratic-Republicanism. Other pseudonyms, such as “A Republican” and “A Citizen,” expressed the interests of the virtuous American. These less ostentatious pseudonyms likely fostered a greater sense of textual authenticity, as the pieces’ authors wrote using a common democratic vocabulary.

A more direct means of expressing party ideology came through the Democratic-Republican societies’ frequent use of circular letters, signed by the president and membership. The printed materials of the societies acted as an intermediary between political elites and the larger citizenry.³⁶ The circular letter and, often, accompanying resolutions reached the widest possible audience and was often transmitted far beyond the local community of the authoring society. Moreover, the letters’ irregularity in appearing likely afforded them increased attention and legitimacy when they were published. The presence of formal resolutions within the letters only further emphasized the deliberate and official nature of their message. Yet the unanimity expressed by both news and

³⁴ Eran Shalev, “Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms during the American Revolution and Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, No. 2 (2003): 158.

³⁵ Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*,” 35.

³⁶ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 132.

editorial content on the meanings of Democratic-Republicanism hid internal divisions within the societies when responding to controversial events. Precisely how Democratic-Republicans employed these strategies to define the limits of party liberalism became most obvious in their reactions to the Haitian Revolution in 1793 and Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.

Immediately after the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania appeared in spring of 1793 the fledging political organizations encountered the problem of the Haitian Revolution. Beginning in 1791, the Haitian Revolution marked a period of conflict in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which eventually resulted in the island's permanent independence. The revolt proved to be more brutal than Americans originally expected, and violence in Saint-Domingue only escalated with time. In July 1793, the *National Gazette* reported: "The tyrannies and cruelties hitherto inflicted by the whites in these 'hells' of negroes, the islands, defy a parallel in all of history, ancient or modern."³⁷ As white and black refugees poured into Philadelphia, especially after the burning of Cap Français in the summer of 1793, many residents saw the immigrants as destitute victims rather than honorable revolutionaries.³⁸ White refugees told stories of immense bloodshed and the guerilla tactics used by rebels. To Philadelphians, in violating the rules of conventional warfare, Haitian revolutionaries more closely resembled primitive barbarians than honorable soldiers. Despite its clearly democratic overtones, the Haitian Revolution became a sensitive issue for Democratic-Republicans.

³⁷ *National Gazette*, July 31, 1793.

³⁸ Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), *Encountering Revolution*, 60-61

Silence generally characterized the Democratic-Republican response to the events in Saint-Domingue. Neither society passed a single resolution praising a non-European revolution. By excluding the Haitian Revolution from editorials and the printed correspondence of the Democratic-Republican societies, Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia dismissed the Haitian Revolution as a legitimate democratic revolution. Instead, editors confined the uprising to news content, which emphasized the violence and slave rebellion like qualities of the event. Democratic-Republicans' non-response to the Haitian Revolution arose from the problems the event posed to party ideology. When defending the French Revolution, Democratic-Republicans dismissed periods of violence as necessary evils. As Jefferson expressed during his tenure as Minister to France, Democratic-Republicans believed that "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."³⁹ The gruesome scenes of the Haitian's Revolution that filled the pages of Philadelphia periodicals were intolerable.⁴⁰ After reading exaggerated news reports of violence and destruction in Saint Domingue, it would have seemed natural to Philadelphians that the revolt in Haiti had little to do with the principles espoused by Democratic-Republicans. The uprising's sustained violence alone was incompatible with the Democratic-Republican view of enlightened revolution. Reacting to stories of violence in Saint Domingue, Democratic-Republicans thus considered the Haitian Revolution a slave rebellion rather than a democratic revolution.⁴¹

Even if Democratic-Republicans could tolerate the horrors of the revolt's violence, the racial themes of the Haitian Revolution threatened to fracture the party.

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, November 13, 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al., Vol. 12 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 356.

⁴⁰ White, *Encountering Revolution*, 53-54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Despite their unity on many issues of national policy, Democratic-Republicans divided sharply on the issue slavery. In November of 1794 the New York Tammany Society seemed to express their approval of these radical measures. Celebrating the 1783 British evacuation of New York City, the society passed a resolution in favor of the “speedy abolition of every species of slavery throughout America.”⁴² The context of the resolution suggests that the society considered abolitionism as a natural consequence of the American and other democratic revolutions. At the same time, the Republican Society of South Carolina closed in 1794 for fear that their pro-revolutionary platforms would incite a slave rebellion.⁴³ More importantly, on February 4, 1794 the French National Convention voted to abolish slavery and soon thereafter extended the vote to the *gens de couleur* (free people of color). Endorsing the Haitian Revolution as a legitimate democratic revolution following the French emancipation of former slaves would have constituted support for abolitionism on the part of Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republicans. Although some members of Democratic-Republican societies north of Maryland were members of abolitionist groups, members of Philadelphia’s Democratic-Republican societies recognized the divisiveness of the issue.⁴⁴ The German Republican Society and the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania remained silent and thereby

⁴² “Resolutions Adopted to Commemorate the 1793 British Evacuation of New York City, November 26, 1794,” in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 204. Although the New York Tammany Society was originally founded as a social and benevolent society, during the 1790s it gradually became a Republican society. The Tammany Society was unlike Democratic-Republican societies in that it did not conduct debates and often did not take stands on political issues. They did, however, play active roles in patriotic celebrations of the American and French revolutions. Young, *The Democratic-Republicans of New York*, 350 and 398-399.

⁴³ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 185-186.

⁴⁴ For members of the Democratic-Republican societies as members of abolitionist societies, see Foner, introduction to *The Democratic-Republican Societies: A Documentary Sourcebook*, 12-13.

implicitly distanced the Haitian Revolution from the Democratic-Republican Party. Throughout their silence, Democratic-Republican leaders expressed their horror at the events in Haiti and their belief that bloody slave insurrections could not be justified as revolution.

In 1794, the Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia faced a more proximate rebellion, one that splintered the city's popular societies. Ever since Congress had passed Hamilton's excise tax on alcoholic spirits in 1791, western Pennsylvanians opposed the measure through public meetings and nonviolent protests.⁴⁵ At the same time, both the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania had expressed their distaste for the excise tax Congress had placed on the production of alcohol at the recommendation of Hamilton.⁴⁶ In the summer of 1794, western protests became armed rebellion, and on August 7, President Washington invoked the Marshall Law of 1792, calling out 13,000 men of the federal militia. Although Washington's force met little resistance, the effects of the Whiskey Rebellion reverberated throughout Philadelphia's Democratic-Republican societies.⁴⁷

To many of Philadelphia's Democratic-Republican leaders, the armed rebellion in western Pennsylvania represented a dangerous breakdown of America's democratic legal framework. Although Democratic-Republicans envisioned themselves as the party of

⁴⁵ Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, 210. Although a number of other issues facing western Pennsylvanians—such as navigation rights to the Mississippi and United States-Indian relations—contributed to the outbreak of violence in 1794, the excise tax was the primary grievance in that it reinforced westerners' beliefs that they were underrepresented in, and thus not taken seriously by, the national government. See Thomas Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87-88, 93-95, and 109-124.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, May 30, 1794.

⁴⁷ For an account of Rebellion, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 461-488; and Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 175-189.

democracy and the inheritors of a revolutionary tradition, they were bound by the laws of the republic and expressed a strong distaste for anarchy. On July 29 the German Republican Society expressed its distaste for the western rebellion, resolving “that every law enacted by a majority of the people ought be submitted to, and that every opposition to the laws by violence is unconstitutional and dangerous.”⁴⁸ Similarly, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania met on September 11 to consider a number of resolutions concurring with executive that “the strength of the State ought to be exerted should the power of reason prove inadequate with the Western citizens.” Both societies agreed: although the voice of the majority was the “only legitimate authority” in a republic, the western Pennsylvanians had unjustly violated the rule of law.⁴⁹ As an editorial in the *General Advertiser* clarified, although distaste for the Whiskey Act did constitute the “will of the majority,” the citizens of western Pennsylvania were unjust in resorting to “anarchy and barbarism.” The editorial continued, “let the citizens there petition for [the Act’s] repeal, expose its defects, or injustices through the medium of the press; let them change their representation, put into their legislature men whom they know will be active to procure its repeal.”⁵⁰ Despite being threatened by Federalist and British tyranny, the Republic was nonetheless a stable, legal entity, and the anarchical populism of the Whiskey rebellion threatened to subvert that stability. The societies then wasted little time in following initial editorials in the *General Advertiser* and *Independent Gazetteer* with official party stances explaining how the complex Rebellion interacted with the party’s traditionally liberal and revolutionary ideologies.

⁴⁸ *Gazette of the United States*, September 1, 1794.

⁴⁹ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, September 11, 1794.

⁵⁰ *General Advertiser*, July 26, 1794.

Yet the published resolutions, signed by the presidents and secretaries of the two societies, belie the fractures the Whiskey Rebellion had caused among the membership of the German Republican Society and Democratic Society of Pennsylvania. A number of members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania initially objected to the original language of the resolutions, especially the third, which had labeled the western revolt “an outrage upon order and democracy, so far from entitled them the patronage of Democrats.” The invective resolutions barely passed on a vote of 30 to 29. Following the vote, the president quit his seat, accompanied by nearly half of those present at the meeting.⁵¹ Others, including Michael Leib, who had presented the offending resolution, left the society to serve in the Pennsylvania militias dispatched to western Pennsylvania in an effort to show the westerners “the submission that the President required.”⁵² Indeed, although the society generally agreed that western Pennsylvanians had violated the law and needed to be quelled, just how much of an “outrage” the rebellion was remained disputed. The final commentary on the Whiskey Rebellion published by the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, to Leib’s chagrin, excluded his third resolution.⁵³ Despite these fractures, the Democratic-Republican societies strained to convey public consensus, understanding that their resolutions constituted an expression of ideology for a much larger political body of Democratic-Republicans.⁵⁴ By electing to publish a moderate criticism of the Whiskey Rebellion, the leaders of the Democratic-Republican movement evidenced the limits to their revolution-minded liberalism and the extent to which they

⁵¹ Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, September 11, 1794.

⁵² Michael Leib to Lydia Leib, Oct. 5, 11, and 20, 1794. Leib Harrison Papers. Pennsylvania Historical Society.

⁵³ *General Advertiser*, September 13, 1794; and *Gazette of the United States*, September 15, 1794.

⁵⁴ Koshnik, “*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*,” 37-38.

strove to regulate party ideology through condemning actions they believed incompatible with party ideology.

Just as Democratic-Republicans strove to create a popular opposition movement characterized by its inclusiveness, they additionally sought to assign limits to their vague platforms of “democracy” and “liberalism” in order to maintain a degree of ideological uniformity. The press allowed leading Democratic-Republicans to do just that: by publishing letters and resolutions of the local Democratic-Republican societies, party leaders could publically regulate Democratic-Republican beliefs by conveying platforms of the society as general opinion through seemingly unanimous resolution or the opinion of anonymous political writers. As a result, the meaning of the French Revolution for Americas became controlled by letters and resolutions regarding domestic policies. By publically decrying the Whiskey Rebellion, Democratic-Republicans articulated clearly that approval for the successes of the French Revolution by no means constituted an approval of domestic insurrection in a constitutional republic.

The burgeoning print culture of 1790s Philadelphia provided a public space, in which Democratic-Republicanism coalesced into a singular and more clearly defined movement. News from France as well as article extolling the progress of international democratic revolution provided the developing opposition movement with a clear legitimacy and cause for concern. While news from France energized Philadelphians’ opposition to Federalism by more firmly establishing connections between British tyranny and American conservatism, at the same time, Democratic-Republicans faced the problem of moderating a large, populist movement. Although they partially accomplished

this goal through controlling party ideology in opinion pieces and society circulars, the ideological diversity of the Francophile Democratic-Republican movement increasingly began to fracture as some Democratic-Republicans radicalized and as the United States' relationship with France soured after the passage of the Jay Treaty.

Conclusion

Between 1795 and 1796 Democratic-Republicanism suffered from the one-two punch of internal divisions caused by the Whiskey Rebellion as well as the consequences of the United States' souring relationship with France following the implementation of the Jay Treaty. Although the extent to which the Mango Creek and Washington County societies of western Pennsylvania had orchestrated the Whiskey Rebellion still remains debated, the Federalists had begun to link directly the western insurrection with the Democratic-Republican societies by the end of 1794 and beginning of 1795.¹ Still, Democratic-Republicans defended themselves against charges that the movement's popular societies had orchestrated the western rebellion in an effort to overthrow the Constitution.² As the German Republican Society asked in a published address to Philadelphians, "If Democrats have been the instruments of western insurrection, how will it be explained, that they were the foremost to suppress it?"³ Through their active publishing campaigns of late 1794 and early 1795, the Democratic-Republican societies of Philadelphia seemed to have salvaged their public image as legitimate political societies. Throughout 1795 the societies continued to draw large crowds at their Independence Day celebration and other French-themed civic festivals.

¹ Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, 219-220. Hamilton first asserted that the rebellion "is to be essentially attributed to one of those Societies sometimes called the Mango Creek Society—sometimes the *Democratic Society*" in a letter to Pennsylvania Representative Thomas Fitzsimons, who later repeated Hamilton's remarks in a speech to the House. Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Fitzsimons, November 27, 1794, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. 17, 394. For an excellent account of the societies' formation and involvement in the Whiskey Rebellion, see Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 163-165.

² Meeting Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, December 18, 1794.

³ *General Advertiser*, December 27, 1794.

The internal divisions that appeared within the societies following the Whiskey Rebellion, however, crippled the Democratic-Republican societies and, as a result, the greater Democratic-Republican Party. In assuring the public that all members the Philadelphia societies denounced the Whiskey Rebellion, the German Republican Society told citizens, “Our brethren, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, could have made a quorum in the field.”⁴ Yet the debates on the Whiskey Rebellion had actually split the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, leading half of the membership to walk out of the September 11 meeting. Indeed, the rebellion and ensuing Democratic-Republican debates on the authority of Federal versus state and local law fractured the diverse coalition of the Democratic-Republican societies. On the one hand, elite and middle-class members of the society believed that although the spheres of federal and local authority were distinct, in the event of conflict between the two, the federal authority should prevail. To the lower-class members of the society, the opposite held true: ultimate legal authority derives from localities.⁵

Many historians have rightly identified the Whiskey Rebellion as a turning point for the Democratic-Republican societies as well as the larger opposition movement. Rather than function as the source of fracture within the societies, the Whiskey Rebellion did more to expose the fundamental problem of early Democratic-Republicanism. The party’s core ideology drew from the revolutionary events in America and France, where majority rule and popular upheaval against unjust laws were legitimate courses of action in the absence of a representative democratic government. In their printed materials and at their public celebrations, party leaders told members to fight against Hamilton’s

⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 29, 1794.

⁵ Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 213-214.

British-like economic policies or the tyrannical Jay Treaty. Liberty caps, poles, and trees similarly instructed citizens to actively oppose Federalists in the name of liberty and democracy. Yet the Democratic-Republican Party of Philadelphia never specified what concrete actions their followers should take in opposing these measures. To a citizen reading newspapers or attending popular celebrations, Democratic-Republican verbal and visual language seemed to point to a number of possible courses of action ranging from voting against Federalists in Congressional elections to deposing the Washington administration by force. But what methods of opposition were appropriate in the United States? Until 1794, Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans societies had not yet provided an answer, leaving the issue up to the interpretation of individual members.

The Whiskey Rebellion forced Democratic-Republicans to consider the extent to which citizens of a republic were justified in protesting and resisting "unjust" laws. Certainly, the Whiskey Rebellion would have constituted a legitimate response to a tyrannical law in the context of a monarchy. Many western Pennsylvanians and some of Philadelphia's Democratic-Republicans saw the continuity between the Whiskey Rebellion and the American Revolution. They believed that "another central government had gone awry" and upset the delicate balance of liberty and order. Just as armed resistance constituted their forefathers' and oppressed Frenchmen's only recourse against the tyrannies of the British government and Ancien Régime, westerners' perceived the same revolutionary tactics to be their only means of preserving liberty.⁶ To Democratic-Republicans who condemned the Whiskey Rebellion, such violence was never justified in a republic. Although these Democratic-Republicans agreed that Hamilton's Whiskey Act and larger economic plan represented a move toward the British political-economic

⁶ Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 225-227.

system, they argued that the United States provided citizens with recourse. Unlike in the American Colonies and prerevolutionary France, citizens of the United States were subject to laws passed by elected representatives, for there was no hereditary monarchy or distant political body imposing unjust laws without Americans' consent. For this latter group, invoking the French Revolution meant encouraging citizens to work through existing legal means of preserving and expanding American democracy. Although the ideological inconsistencies and the potential for internal divisions existed from the outset of the Democratic-Republican Party's formation, the controversial Whiskey Rebellion forced the party to confront and reconcile members' various interpretations of what their language and symbols actually meant, temporarily fracturing the societies and the party.

Democratic-Republicans partially recovered from the Whiskey Rebellion as the political tension in western Pennsylvania eased. Moreover, the successes of the French Revolution in 1795, including the establishment of the Batavian Republic in the Netherlands, as well as the presentation of the Jay Treaty to Congress managed to hold the party together. Indeed, the public celebrations and protests these two events inspired temporarily reunited the factions that began to appear in 1794. The breakdown of the United States' relationship with France finally crippled the Democratic-Republican Party, which owed its success and legitimacy to the progress of the French Revolution.

In January of 1796 the Jay Treaty that Democratic-Republicans had so hotly contested took effect, and the relationship between the United States and France began to sour. America had entered into a treaty with France's enemy Great Britain, and, to the French Directory, this constituted a formal alliance. Revolutionary Jean Fauchet's speech to the Directory articulated the injury France felt as the treaty came into effect. He

declared that the United States shall be made to hear “the voice of France thundering against the treaty and demanding justice.”⁷ France began seizing United States cargo vessels in the summer of 1796, and refused to receive Minister-designate Charles Pinckney in early 1797. As tensions grew, it appeared as if war with France was becoming inevitable.⁸ Attacks on the character of the French Revolution accompanied the escalation of conflict between the United States and France: Americans began to give credence to stories of the Terror’s violent qualities.⁹

Naturally, popular Democratic-Republicanism in Philadelphia suffered greatly as a result. Federalists had already linked the societies to the western insurrection, and Americans became more convinced that the Democratic-Republican societies constituted radical, subversive institutions. Indeed, their popularity derived from the positive feelings the French Revolution evoked in American citizens. As Philadelphians disassociated the American Revolution from the French Revolution they similarly disassociated themselves with the Democratic-Republican societies, which they perceived as more closely resembling the French Jacobin Clubs rather than the idealized Sons of Liberty.

Weakened by the Whiskey Rebellion and Americans’ increasingly negative opinion of the French Revolution, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania (considered the “*mother society*”) disbanded in early 1796.¹⁰ The celebrations of France that

⁷ Quoted in Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 647.

⁸ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 239-240; and Elkins and McKittrick, 647-648.

⁹ Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 200-201.

¹⁰ Although minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania do not exist for 1795, resolutions of the society appear in the *Aurora* on March 21 and a circular letter from the society in the *New York Journal* on March 25, 1795. See, “Notice of Dissolution, January 25, 1796,” “Resolutions Adopted on the Importance of Establishing Public Schools, March 19, 1795,” and “Letter from the Corresponding Committee to the Committee of Correspondence of the Democratic Society of the City of New York, March 25, 1795,” in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 108-110.

continued into 1796 ceased to be partisan affairs as the political gap that the Democratic-Republican societies had bridged between Philadelphia's elite/middle-classes and the lower-classes widened. The first Democratic-Republican opposition to the nation's Federalist administrations dissolved into disjointed populist celebrations and shadow Democratic-Republican societies with little political power. In the span of five years, the radicalized French Revolution had inspired, facilitated, and torn apart the first formal opposition party in the United States.

Most importantly, early Democratic-Republicanism exposed the complex problem of interpreting the American Revolution for citizens of the early Republic. Although all Americans seemed to agree that their revolution was a radical step toward representative government, Hamiltonians and Democratic Republicans (as well as smaller factions within each group) disagreed on the meaning of their revolutionary heritage for the young United States. For Federalists, the struggle for independence constituted the first step toward establishing a stable European-like nation state modeled after the British system. For Democratic-Republicans, the revolution only marked the beginning of a continuous movement for establishing democratic government on the principles of the enlightenment.

The radicalism of the French Revolution which, for better or for worse, nearly every Philadelphian accepted as an extension of its American counterpart, legitimized the opinion that the democratic promise of the American Revolution had not yet been fulfilled. Celebrating both the French and American struggles for liberty gave voice to individuals discontented with Hamiltonian Federalism but who were nominally excluded from political discourse. The Democratic-Republican movement that developed

concurrently with the French Revolution allowed Philadelphians to openly contest Federalist meanings of democracy and liberty for the United States' republican government—a set of discussions which would continue well into the nineteenth century.

Although short-lived, the movement additionally left an indelible impact on opposition politics in the early Republic and led American politicians to consider the legitimacy of political associations within the context of a republican government. Federalists saw the societies as dangerous and warned that such popular political associations interfered with the “regular deliberation and action of the Constituted authorities.”¹¹ Jeffersonian Republicans, however, saw the potential of controlled popular associations within a larger party structure. Although they had distanced themselves from popular Democratic-Republicanism, Jefferson and Madison observed the potential of populism to invigorate Americans politically. Between 1793 and 1796, Philadelphians “laid the groundwork for Jeffersonian Republicanism” and initiated a long tradition of popular political culture that would continue well into the nineteenth century.¹²

¹¹ Quoted in Koschnik, “*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*,” 38.

¹² Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 276-286; and Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 205-206.

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